ENCHANTED HEARTS

DARRAGH ALDRICH

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Already "Comfort" had begun to work her enchantments on Martin and Katherine Woods

Enchanted Hearts

BY

DARRAGH ALDRICH

DRAMATIZED AS
A PRINCE THERE WAS

FRONTISPIECE BY
FRANCES ROGERS

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Our first book is lovingly dedicated to Mother and Dad for a reason which everyone that has had a Mother and Dad like ours will intuitively divine

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CHAPTER I

MRS. PROUTY'S boarders always counted the houses after they turned into West Sixty-blankth Street. Of course this was not entirely necessary, for Mrs. Prouty's number was quite visible above the door. It was rather the result of habit acquired during the early dusk of winter evenings when Mrs. Prouty's sense of economy would not admit of lighting the hall light until fifteen minutes before the dinner gong sounded. On such evenings there was no distinguishing mark about the Prouty boarding-house—pardon; Mrs. Adeline Prouty's exclusive family residence—which extended the privilege to a few favoured souls of housing them and furnishing more or less adequate bodily sustenance in consideration of varying sums per week! To call it a boarding-house in the presence of the hostess herself was to subject one's head to the outpourings of vials of wrath. Perhaps this was one reason why there were always plenty of empty rooms

at Mrs. Prouty's. Despite the sneers of cynics, the human family does not like to exist under perpetual social obligations. It prefers, when it can, to pay for what it receives and to be independent. It likes nomenclature, also, to be unequivocal. If at all times it does not insist that the proverbial spade be called a spade or enlarged to a steam shovel, at least it does not—in these post-Victorian days—prefer it hand-painted, tied with a ribbon, resting against the parlour mantel.

Had Mrs. Prouty, amid frantic hand-to-hand struggles with grammar, foregone her claims to aristocratic Southern lineage—which might have been located, it is true, within walking distance of Mason and Dixon's line by an enthusiastic mountain climber—she might have prospered more after the late unlamented Prouty's death. One must, however, have one's solace as well as one's outlet for imagination, and the Southern myth—as Cricket (self-styled the "ill-starred boarder") was wont to remark—served Mrs. Prouty well in both capacities.

It was this same Cricket, moreover, who, in order to illustrate the care with which Mrs. Prouty's boarders should count the houses, told of absent-mindedly following a boarder of a house adjacent into the latter's abode, and of not discovering his

mistake until he saw strange faces about him at dinner, half an hour afterward. Allowance should be made, one must admit, for Cricket's tales, yet it may safely be said that to those who have ever been within the sacred portals of that anomaly, a private boarding-house in the West Sixtieth section of New York, the entire scheme of Mrs. Prouty's *ménage* is known.

The high stoop covering the basement door, with its clanging gong; the dining-room window, opening —if its formidable iron bars warrant such a term— upon the area way, a bit below street level, are only a trifle more familiar than the peculiar aroma rising from the kitchen and greeting one as he turns his key in the latch of the front door. That clanging gong and wafting aroma will bring memories trooping to every quondam boarding-housed soul. Though high-priced authors continue to write of languorous society puppets, and the social columns of chromatic dailies swell with the doings of the *élite* as if their movements alone were of moment, the real life of Manhattan town is lived in its boarding-houses. The typical children of the great, restless, kaleidoscopic metropolis drift from shelter to shelter as caprice of mind or purse demands. They are of the same species as the prominent New Yorker who drifts

from club to club—as the society leader who flits from resort to resort; the latter are merely less interesting and more exotic variations.

The basement dining room at the breakfast hour at Mrs. Prouty's was at the best a drab affair. The table was always set more carelessly—if possible—than at the evening meal, with silver a bit more tarnished, flung hastily upon a spottier cloth. But breakfast—with the clock pointing its hands reproachfully toward an hour which, somehow, was always later than one thought—was not a time for fastidious observation of the nicer matters of living.

Hence three persons—one calls them persons, advisedly, for so colourless were they that one took away in one's mind merely the fact of humanity—were plying knife and fork and spoon, on this particular morning in early May, methodically, doggedly, and almost rhythmically.

> "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> 'Twere done quickly."

Mrs. Prouty was herself at the head of the table; in fact, as in the case of the immortal Macgregor, Mrs. Prouty's presence there as well as the placement of the dish of sticky breakfast food, marked this out as the chief seat. It is really not fair to

Mrs. Prouty to introduce her at breakfast. Breakfast was not her best meal. In the evening, corseted and coifed, with a ruche at the neck which hid in greater or less degree the encroachments of age, a bit of colour beneath the latest, widely advertised powder, she was not unattractive—particularly if one chanced to meet her first on an evening when the languidly performed chores of the day had left her time and inclination to manicure.

No twenty-four-hour acquaintance of Mrs. Prouty's was ever left uninformed verbally of the fact that, in her day, Mrs. Prouty had been a beauty as well as a patrician Southern belle and unless he were indeed a carping critic, he was as likely as not to accept this estimate unless—a fatal "unless"—he saw her at breakfast. Further than this it is not necessary to limn Mrs. Prouty at her worst hour. Suffice it to say that the inward and spiritual grace—if such it may be called—followed the outward and visible signs of her personality, and her mind was at once flabby, lean in spots, and yet in other directions surging over its confines in a sort of sickly and voluptuous emotionalism.

It was Cricket again who seized upon a phase of the idea when he remarked that Mrs. Prouty's mind, like her hair, had once been blondined and even

though it were no longer done it still remained streaked near the roots.

The dogged consumers of Mrs. Prouty's hospitality paid no attention whatsoever to the occasional explosions of her not-unmusical voice behind the morning paper. Theirs was the utter indifference of weariness. Let be. The most-talked-of club man might have murdered his mistress; the most limelit actress might have put her Pomeranian into trousers; what wotted they?

"Well—what d'ye know!"

The astonished ejaculation from the abounding breasts, against which the lurid-headlined paper creaked, might have meant that either catastrophe had befallen the country.

Having choked down the last mouthful, each boarder arose, went hurriedly into the dark entry where stood a decrepit hall tree, donned hat and coat silently, and then disappeared with the clang of the outer door whose bell gave forth a seemingly raucous joy with each exit. A flash of them was seen in the area way as they climbed the two steps to street level, and then, if one were observant and of a romantic turn of mind, he might note that a lone figure lingered a fraction of a second with a backward look until the last clang resounded, and that

this figure wore a feather in its hat, and a veil which, with bedraggled coquetry, ended at the nose. The producer of the last clang must needs hurry—or fail to punch the clock at the time appointed.

A light step descending, and the humming of a popular air in a throaty baritone, made Mrs. Prouty glance up from the morning's detail of crimes, as Cricket blithely flung his top coat and soft tweed hat upon the rack.

"A-way down South . . ." The humming vocalized into the dramatic close quite evidently for Mrs. Prouty's benefit.

"Morning, Mr. Cricket. How'd you know I was just crazy over that song?"

"My woman's intuition," he responded gravely as he whirled out a chair with considerable gusto. "Ha!" (looking round with apparent carelessness) "am I the last or merely the latest?"

"Oh, dear no, Mr. Cricket. Gladdus and Mr. Short is yet to come—and if Glad gets docked again this week she won't have nothing left on pay day. And then there's Miss Woods—though I don't count her to be sure"—as she served Cricket generously from the sticky dish in front of her and pushed the pitcher of milk toward him.

"And why not count Miss Woods?" rather elab-

orately drowning his glutinous mass. "To me she seems a unit like the rest of us. If I were counting" (he flipped the sugar spoon four times above the peak that arose from the blue-white sea) "I should certainly count Miss Woods. I should say, 'Miss Woods—one!' Gently but firmly I should say to her: 'Miss Woods, kindly remember that you are number one and consequently are not to come straggling in, out of your order, after two, three, and four. Your number may not be called again.'"

Mrs. Prouty giggled appreciatively. "Oh, Mr. Cricket, you are so funny! That's what comes of being a lawyer, I suppose."

Cricket smiled bitterly as he viciously dug in a spoon.

"You have hit the nail exactly on the point, as usual," he commented. "There is nothing on earth so funny as the law—the more law the more fun. Bacon and potatoes now, Mrs. Prouty, please."

"Comfort's upstairs makin' beds so I'll jest get 'em myself. Cook says she wishes they'd all get down 's prompt as you do," and Mrs. Prouty rose languorously to her carpet-slippered feet and overflowed into the kitchen.

Cricket drummed his short white fingers on the table and gazed at the empty place opposite with an

enigmatical expression. He must see Miss Woods this morning. Her avoidance of him the evening before had been too significant to be to his liking, and aside from his own feeling in the matter, Miss Woods could not afford to thrust friends from her.

"Friends!" At the thought he grunted. "Friends," indeed! None apparently had she in the whole, huge town, except himself and little Comfort—Comfort who was "upstairs making beds"—so that not even a message of cheer could be left.

"Poor little girl!" he said to himself—and it was Miss Woods and not Comfort who formed the vision of his inner eyes—"Poor, lonely, helpless, little girl!" He ran his plump fingers through the decently heavy fringe of black hair that was punctiliously brushed back to cover in part the bald spot on the crown, and then adjusted his nose-glasses more carefully. Despite an obvious lack of height, there was an air of distinction about Cricket that singled him out in groupings of men. It might have been the assurance of manhood in his five feet four; it might have been the merry kindliness of his eyes; it might have been the expression of his mouth, the quizzical humour of it that changed so swiftly from a mocking skepticism to a large and tender tolerance in viewing

the follies and foibles of the world which furnished him his material.

It was a much more imposing individual who presented an appearance at the hat rack and disposed of rather pronounced outer garments with a series of arm movements that unconsciously suggested the automatons of the vaudeville ventriloquist's act. He was rather over tall and his frock-coated figure presented a perfection of outline which rivalled that of the haberdasher's model. One felt instinctively that he would stop at a florist's on the way to his daily occupation and purchase a gardenia for his buttonhole. He was immaculately shod, and his lustreless dark hair was brushed back from his narrow forehead so severely that it suggested the notion of his expressionless blue eyes being pulled open very widely on that account.

"H'are you, Short," greeted Cricket briefly in response to a silent but very angular bend of the head by way of good morning.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Short! That breakfast food's cold, I'm afraid! Jest hand it to me, will you, Mr. Cricket, and I'll het it up a bit for Mr. Short."

Cricket rather ungraciously acquiesced in her request. There was always an inexplicable re-

sentment that arose in the breast of Cricket when Short was about. Why a mere floor-walker should have been given the inches not vouchsafed to a clerk in a law office was only one more argument to undermine any theory of abstract justice in the world.

"I can't wait for any heatin', Mrs. Prouty," interposed Mr. Short with an accession of dignity. "I'll cut the breakfast food if it's cold and go on to meat and potatoes, and please rush 'em. I'm supposed to be on the floor at least half an hour before the store opens, and lately I have been coming in after they was all in place."

"Oh, dear, Mr. Short, is that so?"

"It is. And if I can't have my meals on time, I may have to move farther down town. I ain't so stuck on the swellness of the Sixties but I could break away if it came to a show down." Mr. Short seldom talked, and never conversed, but occasionally he was moved to deliver himself of a monologue.

Mrs. Prouty was plainly agitated, and Cricket silently moved his eyes over the portion of Mr. Short's anatomy which was above the plane of the extended elbows.

"Oh, please don't talk that way, Mr. Short! You know that it would just break our heart to lose you, and you ain't the kind of man that would be con-

genial in the thee-atrical district! They ain't your class. You know that now, don't cha?" She leaned toward him with a smile whose warmth failed to thaw his icy reserve. It was with a sense of great relief that she heard the light tripping of her only hopeful down the stairs, and the click of her high heels in the dark hallway.

"What a wonderful thing, Short, it is to have height," murmured Cricket as he saw the smile become fixed and meaningless upon Mrs. Prouty's face. "It presents an ever-ready aspect of preparedness which discomfits the mere ordinary length human, especially one who just misses the normal mark, when he wishes with all his heart to administer a judicious—kick!"

"Oh, Mr. Cricket! Gentlemen!" besought Mrs. Prouty, bridling a bit and casting a languishing glance at the knight who had suddenly assumed her colours. "I can appreciate how Mr. Short feels. Of course, with a business man, that has to come before everything. . . ."

"Hoddoo, everybody," the voice was young, cheery, and not without sweetness, despite a certain hardness of quality. "What's eatin' ye, Ma? Anythin' left for little Gladdie?" The mass of light brown hair, already arranged in accordance

with the dictates of the most extreme fashion, was touched with sophisticated fingers as she put the gay query and slid into her place beside the dignified Mr. Short.

"Well, nobody would think that you cared about hanging on to your job," remarked Mrs. Prouty, with motherly indulgence in her tone.

"Gee! you can't expect a girl to get up at sunrise when she's be'n out the night before until the wee ¡and tinies," with an unconscious imitation—or was it merely heredity?—of her mother's languid air. "I guess it ain't so late as all that when the floor-walker ain't gone yet."

Her arch coquetry melted the icy encasement instantly. T"That was sure some treat, Mr. Short," she added. "I'm some crazy over the movies, if you know what I mean. Y'oughta have seen 'em last night, Mr. Cricket."

"I dare say I missed a great deal," murmured Cricket pleasantly, eyeing her with a secret amusement which he would have been astonished to know was not in the least lost upon the shrewd Gladys Prouty. When she was about, he was unusually silent, enjoying the incessant flow of words and the occasional flashes of real keenness in penetration of the human mask.

"Oh, he's on to me," remarked Miss Gladys frankly to her mother on one occasion when, with the fatuous obsession of maternal pride, the latter touched upon Cricket's evident attention to all that Gladys had to say. "I don't mind! He's got me like a little bug under a microscope, watching me squirm so he can put me down in his note book under a headin'. I know his kind. They think they're hard-headed scientists, as Crick says, but buhlieve me they're the kind that get bowled over by a skirt quicker'n a wink. Only it ain't my model that does it. I'm on to him, too—big as a house. It's Woodsy that's got him going and she don't know it, poor little fool! She's all right—I don't mind Woodsy—but she hasn't got pep; and buhlieve me, in this day and age it's p-e-p that gets there and not the modest violet. My middle name is Pep and I don't care who knows it."

CHAPTER II

WHILE this confession had been uttered at least a week before the somewhat eventful morning upon which we invisibly dropped into Mrs. Prouty's boarding-house, yet a remembrance of it flashed into Mrs. Prouty's mind as she heard Cricket's absent-minded reply and saw him direct an occasional anxious gaze toward the door.

"I was sayin'," continued Miss Prouty, upon whom the wandering of his attention was not lost, "that even though it must be an awful hard life, I'd go in fer it in a minnit if Ma would let me. One of the managers told me that I had the build and the hair, and he maybe could fix me out if I wouldn't start right in kickin' on the stunts they wanted me to do. That's the way with most of 'em he says—get their trainin', and then it's nix on the rough stuff for their delicate constitutions. Ain't there cakes, Ma?"

"Well, Comfort's supposed to wait on the table and I get sorta rattled when I have to do a hundred things myself."

"Where's the kid? Perusin' literachure this morning?" The ironic shaft plainly irritated Cricket into a reply.

"Your mother said that she was making the beds, Miss Gladys."

"More likely she's under the bed, readin' fairy stories. It gets me how even a kid can believe that stuff, or like it."

"Well, you see, Comfort is only eight, and young for her age in many ways. When she is about eleven years older, she may be able to sit entranced before 'The Magic Diamond' or 'The Impossible Case of Marie Dix.'"

"D'ye get that sarcasticism?" murmured Gladys audibly, nudging Mr. Short. "I guess that was meant for my shush, all right. But you can't get away from the fact that where the money goes is the thing that's got the real goods, and I ain't heard of a million bein' made on a fairy story book yet."

Cricket quite evidently started to speak, and then suddenly changed his mind and confined himself to the simple request for more coffee. To the shrewd Gladys Prouty, his decision of the futility of argument with one who held her views was quite apparent, and she smarted under the finality of his silence.

"Speakin' of literachure," she drawled with a sidelong glance at him to observe the effect of her words, "what time does the authorine get down anyway? We're gettin' nervous. She's missed the last six cues."

"She'll miss more'n that if she ain't careful," rasped out Mrs. Prouty. "Sometimes she don't come down at all, but it don't make no difference in her bill. Meal tickets is all right for dinner but I won't give 'em for breakfast . . . no, sir! This ain't a regular boarding-house. I aim to make it a home, and I believe in all gettin' together in the morning; besides, they ain't any money in tickets for breakfasts. The meal is here, and costs me just as much whether they come or not; so take it or leave it, I say, but I don't take nothing off for what you don't eat."

"Do you mean to say that she—goes without breakfasts?" Cricket's anxiety overcame all else. He had the usual masculine horror of insufficient food for the body of the beloved, though he might underestimate the starvation of her soul.

"Quite often," acknowledged Mrs. Prouty easily, adding with significant meaning: "but she always gets down in time for the mail man; I notice that. And he gives her a thick envelup almost every morn-

ing; I notice that, too. I don't think she's sold a story in the last two months."

"It's kinda hard on you, Ma." Gladys realized that nothing could more nearly provoke ill-considered words from Cricket than the injustice of her sympathy, and she secretly gloated over his compressed lips. Mrs. Prouty was the usual sort of female whose imaginative martyrdom waxed fat upon dolorous reminiscences, revived by friendly condolence, and her voice easily fluttered into a wail.

"It *is* hard on me, and much as I don't like to turn a young girl out in the street, I'm a widow and I gotta have my money to keep this house runnin' right. It ain't justice to the rest of you to let her stay on without paying prompt. She's long overdue an' she ain't got folks, as near as I can make out. Says she had a younger sister once. Guess she died on her . . . but that ain't my fault. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, and I've got to have my money—that's all."

Cricket was astute enough to know that Miss Prouty's sympathy was purposely expressed, and thwarted her design by concealing a yawn quite obviously as he made the negligent observation:

"Of course, Mrs. Prouty, I understand your point perfectly, but don't you imagine that it is simply an

oversight on the part of those who owe Miss Woods for her copying? Of course you knew that she did copying for—er—lawyers, and didn't I understand her to say something about—clergymen?"

"I don't think you did, Mr. Cricket," replied Mrs. Prouty with some asperity, "for Miss Woods, with all her faults, is truthful—I will say that—and all of us know that the only lawyer who has gave her copying to do is one that can't afford to; I can tell him that. I told her it was plumb charity, too. I believe in frankness. Say it right to their face—that's my motto. And when I'm fond of a person like I am of you, Mr. Cricket, I don't like to see them done—that's me all over!"

To Cricket the scene was a Roman amphitheatre and the girl of his love was being thrown to the beasts while he helplessly looked on. No power could drag her out of the arena now. He must fight to close the mouths of the beasts.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Prouty" (he chose his words carefully, and spoke in a gentle tone whose mellifluence deceived none) "that you have rather overstepped the bounds of your kindly interest in my affairs by saying that to Miss Woods. It was very untrue and will undoubtedly cause me the trouble of hunting up another copyist. Miss Woods has

been a great help to me, and now, suddenly, she refuses to do any more. I could not understand it last night, but this morning you have made it quite clear to me. If you have a call for my room at any time, don't hesitate to let me know. I may find that my business necessitates a change. I must have a copyist in the house where I board—one who can take dictation, when necessary, in the evenings."

There was a superb dignity about Cricket when—as Gladys expressed it—he got on his high horse, and kicked in the spurs.

Mrs. Prouty, however, seemed in no whit daunted by the onslaught. If she trembled at the prospective loss of a "prompt-paying boarder," she did not show it. The human family differs from its four-footed brethren chiefly in being able to conceal its emotions at will.

"Mr. Cricket, you're a fine man, but you know that you ain't got the business to be havin' your work copied, and your firm's got its own stenographers. First thing you know, you *will* have to be makin' a change, but it will be to some place not so exclusive as this, nor so homelike. You'd better stay where you're congenial to—that's why I've always kep' in this exclusive neighbourhood. Of course they's cheaper places to be had." With a

somewhat languid interest, she resumed the reading of the social column.

"The Asburys and th' Van Mannikens is home, Gladdus," she observed. "Their plans is not formulated, as yet, but they expects to go to the Adirondacts."

"Y' don't say! Did that Van Manniken girl get engaged while she was in the South? They's on'y one of them left now," she informed Mr. Short who evinced a *blasé* interest in the note. "The last one picked off a Sir Somebody, y' know."

"The Ormsby Crabbs is flittin' to New Port. Sa-ay! Jest listen to what the New Port colony is plannin'!"

"Can't, Ma; I've got to hustle. Keep it fer me to-night. Anything about Charles Martin there? They said a few days ago that he was expected back within a few days."

"Seems as if I saw his name here a minute ago. Yes, here it is:

Mr. Charles Edward Martin has returned from England whither he had gone in search of the body of his brother, Robert Martin, who perished with his bride in the *Titanic* tragedy. Mr. Martin is at the Plaza for a few days but is still suffering from the shock of his brother's death, and will leave almost immediately for Martindale, his country estate, where he will spend the rest of the season in seclusion.

Mrs. Prouty drew a luxuriously sorrowful breath. "It's so sad for him, poor young man!"

"Poor young man!" Gladys grunted. "Well, with a few chilly millions, I think that I could survive the dee-mise of my whole family. Bob got mixed up with a chorus girl or something in the merry-merry line 'bout two or three years ago, and I guess Brother Charley sat up nights for a while. Death ain't nothing to that swell bunch. What they're scairt of is getting in the papers, wrong side to, on the front page."

Cricket grinned appreciatively and forgot his choler.

"Be that as it may"—Gladys arose with an inner feeling of content at her semi-triumph—"it's back to the ribbons for little Gladdie."

"I told you to see if they wasn't likely to be a place open for Miss Woods at Blithedale's if the right person showed up," reminded her mother.

"I did see, Ma, and I told her they was, but she went to see the floor-manager about it—old Badger, y' know," in a conversational aside to Short.

"Well?"

"Nothin' doin'. I guess she wasn't the right person."

"Whad'ye mean, right person?" Short himself became interested as he carefully folded his napkin

twice and stuck a black pin in it. Gladys was rewarded by being strictly the centre of an attentive group, and she thrilled in response.

"I guess he took milady off'n her high horse all right enough. Said he'd give it to her if she went out to dinner with him . . . and—well, I suppose he sorta put it up to her like that. I don't know all that passed, but Amy heard that much. She says Miss Woods never said a word; jest stalked outen there with her head reachin' the clouds. It got her goat all right, though, fer Amy says she seen her afterward in the lavatory, bathing her eyes with cold water."

Cricket's teeth caught the expletive and he swallowed it with a gulp of water.

"That's nothing for old Badger," Short arose to the man's defence ably. "He's not so bad."

"That's what I say," agreed Gladys emphatically. "He don't really mean nothin' by his jolly. Why, I've been out to dinner with him myself."

The admission was lost upon Cricket who was lightly opening and closing his fist as he struggled with his thoughts, but the immaculate Mr. Short looked the girl over from head to foot with a slow displeasure that verged upon suspicion and brought a hysterical little giggle to her throat.

"You have?" The emphatic pronoun seemed to reveal his utter distrust from now on of all the feminine sort.

"Sure thing!" The careless words hid a real anxiety. "I thought you knew it, or I wouldn't of told. Anyway, what have you gotta say about what I do?" The coquettish toss of the head lost its effect somewhat in the hunted expression of the eyes.

"Nothing," enunciated the magnificent figure that was now hunching itself into a pronouncedly modish topcoat, "but I don't take old Badger's girls to the movies, if you know what I mean."

A sickening sensation choked the utterance of Miss Prouty for the first time in her life, and with the intuitive sense of danger impending that is hid in every mother's breast to spring forth when needed, Mrs. Prouty awaited a reply that she might endorse.

"Oh, you've got the idea, all right." The expected retort came tardily from Gladys with a nervous hesitation that was most unusual.

"Old Badger's a skate all right, but he knows a decent girl when he sees her, and he treated me like a queen. If a girl's got a relative back of her, she ain't molested much. I played the home-and mother game strong, and told him where he got off

at—if he didn't want to get reported to headquarters. I never went with him but once, anyway, and I ain't goin' agin, if you wanta know. Take it from me, Shortie, you can trust little Glad to take care of herself."

Mrs. Prouty's dolorous sigh drew attention away from the girl as she tremblingly pinned on her veil.

"A mother's got a nawful responsibility, Mr. Short," she observed, "but Gladdus is as pure a girl as ever lived, if I do say it right before her face. That's what comes of bein' the daughter of a true South'ner," she added comfortably.

The only time that Miss Prouty was in the least embarrassed was when she herself was under discussion—a not infrequent happening when Mrs. Prouty was feeling in a conversational mood.

"Oh, go on, Ma!" she exclaimed on this occasion with a slight irritation. "Somebody's going to call you some day on this Southern stuff and find out that you on'y passed through Mobile oncet. If anybody's going to pike along with me, he'd better hustle. You don't have to be a South'ner to keep straight," was a parting shot, "all you got to do is to use your head and realize that nothing else don't pay."

It lowered Cricket's estimation of the daughter of

the house no whit—this frank admission of inferior motives, combined with the slight *hauteur* with which she received Mr. Short's offer to protect her with his umbrella from the beginnings of a drizzle. However much Cricket might reverence a lofty idealist in truth, an unafraid lack of pretence commanded his admiration.

Mrs. Prouty, however, was slightly restive under the fling. "Gladdus ain't had so much use for South'ners since she's seen Comfort's lackadaisicalness," she explained. "The child is aggervating, but what can you expect from the child of artist folk, shiftluss and no 'count, with their head in the clouds? Of course I never saw the child's father for he was dead before her Ma came here with the baby, but if he painted that truck she got rid of to a dealer, I know what he was like all right."

"You didn't care for his style, eh?"

"Well, who would? Did you ever see any of them?"

"No," admitted Cricket amusedly, "I never did. What became of them when Comfort's mother died?"

"Oh, the same dealer that she sold the rest to come in and looked around when he heard that she was dead, and said that he'd take 'em off my hands

for twenty-five dollars, and I made him take them right away then. I was afraid that he'd go back on his word after he'd had time to think. People do things in the presence of death that is awful foolish sometimes."

"Yes," absently. "You might have sold them for more. How many were there?"

"More?"—astonishedly. "Why, there was on'y four of 'em—little ones at that! No, sir—I got my money before he saw the front door. He was a real kind-hearted man, and used to sell the dinner cards and things she painted. She wasn't so bad. She paid regular as long as she lived—and dinner cards has a good sale if you once get your hand in."

"I think that Comfort has inherited some of her parents' talent. She made a remarkable sketch—for a child—to illustrate one of her fairy stories."

"I don't mind that," with a resigned sigh, "but I hate to have my pie dough made into figgers."

Cricket laughed. "I suppose evidences of artistic genius might be exasperating in the kitchen. Yet the little soul works hard."

"But *slow!* Molasses in January is a hustler compared to her!"

"Where are the child's relatives? Hasn't she any people belonging to her?"

"Well, Mrs. Browne said not, but somehow I didn't believe it. I sorta kept Comfort on, thinking that some day somebody would show up with a lot of money that I might just as well come in for as a norphan asylum. That's why I didn't send her there soon's her Ma died."

Cricket's inquiries had been desultory and casual, purposed more to fill an interim until Miss Woods should appear than to discover anything new in Comfort's story which he had heard a great many times, with astonishingly few variations, from Mrs. Prouty's lips. Never before, however, had she seemed so unimpressed with her own generosity in keeping the tiny orphan girl of four, nor so candid in analyzing her own motives before him. Despite himself, he forgot the lady of his quest for a moment, and let filter through his mind visions of a flowerlike face beaming friendliwise above a tray half as large as the little body that bore it with manful uncomplaint; delicately moulded, sensitive fingers wrinkled and pale from the dish water into which the sturdy little arms plunged blithely with a cheerful disregard of the sudden splashings that wetted the huge apron and dribbled upon the worn little shoes.

He had happened upon her thus once of late, and had found her using the soap shaker with delight,

piling up iridescent foam which she straightway drew up into a topply tower.

"So ho, Fairy-godmother!" he had called to her, from the doorway; "what now—a fairy palace?"

Her absorbed, flushed little face had turned to him with a sudden, wonderful light overspreading it. The bronze-glinted hair, dampened by the steam, clustered in soft ringlets about the broad white forehead beneath which the wide-set gray eyes looked out starrily.

"Oh, Mr. Gnome," she had said breathlessly. "It is, isn't it? I was 'fraid that nobody but me would know." She sighed a tiny sigh. "Sometimes," she had admitted, "I like to have somebody besides me know. My Mama always—knew." Then she splashed the shaker very hard indeed for a minute during his silence. "That," she explained in an odd soft voice, "is a palace where the baby fairies live till their mamas come after them to take them home and sing them to sleep."

That night he had crept up the stairs to the closet-like room where packing boxes, smelling of moth balls, left barely space for a cot in which Comfort's weary little body cuddled at night.

A startled: "Is it you, Stepmother?" answered his knock.

"It's Friend Gnome, Fairy-godmother," his stage whisper informed her, "and there's a little baby fairy here who wants to be snuggled down in bed. I'll leave her by the door." Then he crept away.

Comfort breathlessly drew in the long box and untied important-looking tapes binding a tissue-paper-wrapped figure. Sleep had fled her eyes as if a magic wand had waved it away, and she did not feel even the scraping of the packing box as she flopped down upon the floor in a sudden weakness of joy.

"Oh, Fairy-baby," she exclaimed, hugging tight in her arms the beautiful bisque child in its flowing robe of glistening white. "To think he never knew it was my birthday either!"

Had the motherly faced clerk, who had assured Cricket that little girls of eight who liked fairies would not be too old for a doll, witnessed the scene in the "back store-room" that night, she would have felt well repaid for the time that she had taken from her "noon hour" to aid in the proper selection.

And Cricket had again proved himself a real student of psychology in his decision that the child's vain longing for a mother's love and caresses could best be satisfied by giving expression to the maternal instinct in herself.

Such was the warm, sweet memory that touched

Cricket's cynical lips into tenderness ere he arose and announced that he might better be "pattering toward the subway."

"I hope" (Mrs. Prouty was sweetly anxious about his welfare) "that yo' ain't thinkin' seriously about findin' a place in the thee-atrical district, Mr. Cricket? You seem so South'n, somehow, that I'd hate to lose you. Not but what I could rent that room in a minute, for it's the most pop'lar room in the house. They was a gentleman here only yesterday . . . but I said no. 'Mr. Cricket the gentleman who is now occupying this chamber,' I told him, 'is from the same part of the South that my ancestral place is, and I wouldn't feel right about it.'"

Cricket looked at her with amused curiosity.

"Some day," he remarked slowly, "I am going to write an article on this subject. I shall call it: 'Rooms to Let; A Southern Exposure'."

"Oh, do Mr. Cricket; you're so clever! I'm sure I'd be proud to be in it. I would be in it, wouldn't I?"

"You would." It was one thing of which Cricket felt reasonably certain as he shrugged himself into his light coat and crushed the crown of his tweed hat in his hand. "Well, look who's here! The latest arrival from Fairyland."

Comfort transferred the dustpan from one hand to the other in order to slip four slim little fingers into his palm. Her eyes were unusually starry and her usual soft drawl was breathlessly sudden.

"I was so 'fraid you might be gone," she whispered, looking timidly after Mrs. Prouty as that worthy soul lunged kitchenward, "and I just hatto tell you right away. I've found her!"

"That is amazing!" agreed Cricket enthusiastically. "Right here in New York?"

"In this vee-ry house!" It was emphasized by a pat of the foot.

"I know that my astonishment would pass the bounds of reason if I could discover who it is that you have found!"

"Why, the True Princess, of course!"

"Impossible!"

"Truly!"

"How did you manage it, Miss Sherlock?"

"I don't know what that name is—and anyway, I like 'Fairy-godmother' better. You said you named me that because my job was—some big words."

"Manipulating destiny for helpless mortals," he supplied. "How did you discover the True Princess?"

"By the roseleaf, of course."

"Naturally. How stupid of me! Do you brew a sort of tea of rose leaves? You see, I'm so ignorant of fairy processes!"

"Well, I couldn't do it perzackly as the story is that my Mama used to tell me, but I did it fair."

"You would," Cricket commented heartily, with a squeeze of the fingers. "What are your variations in method?" He loved to use a phrase to mystify her, for she had a deliciously serious little way of puckering her brow and then flashing a smile at him as if they two appreciated the joke at any rate.

"Don't keep Mr. Cricket, Comfort," drawled Mrs. Prouty as she dragged herself heavily up the stairs. "He's in an awful hurry. Besides, you'd better start the dishes right this minute."

Comfort's anxious glance at him was acknowledged by a reassuring smile.

"A lawyer always has time for information upon any branch of knowledge with which he is unfamiliar," he told her gravely. "Proceed upon this matter of the True Princess."

"W-e-ell—you see the True Princess was stealed away when she was a little baby, and when she grew up they couldn't find her, and she had to marry

the Prince and everything, so they *hatto* 'scover which one was truly-ruly her."

"Naturally."

"And so all the wise men in the Court Palace, and the Brine minister, and everybody, they didn't know how to find her till somebody said to take all the mattresses in the Palace and pile them on top of each other and then put underneath the bottomest one a crinkly roseleaf, and the one that was the True Princess would feel it and couldn't sleep while all the other bodies wouldn't know the difference. And she didn't sleep and they found her even though she'd been wawshing dishes at the palace. I was glad that she wawshed dishes"—with a sigh of satisfaction. "I bet they was a bunch of them, too," she added with sudden gusto. Then she looked ashamedly up at him. "I promised—somebody—that I wouldn't say 'bet' any more," she confessed humbly.

Cricket smiled and she began dancing from one foot to the other as she intoned blithely: "It was the vee-ry same somebody that is the True Princess, but—I—won't—tell!"

Cricket's glance at his watch was a perfunctory proceeding, for he had quite resolved to remain until at least the name was spoken in a tone that enriched

it with love. He had known the True Princess for a long time, he told himself, and it was the roseleaf fineness of her own gentle mind that had revealed her to him.

"Of course I couldn't pile up all the mattresses," Comfort was explaining, "but I think my way was puffickly fair: I kept seven roseleaves off'n the little rose that you gave me Sunday night from your buttonhole, and every night I put one under the mattress of somebody—some lady body—in the house. They's six of 'em now, you know, including cook. I thought it might pos-*siss*-ibly be cook. She is very much like a princess when she is dressed up."

"Do you mean to tell me that it wasn't cook?"

She smiled in delight at his mystification.

"She fooled you, too, didn't she? But she isn't. No, sir! She said that she slept as tight as a bug in a rug when I asked her next morning. And Step-sister said on Tuesday night that she pounded her ear from the time she hit the hay—so you see it wasn't her."

"And Miss Vincent?"

"She said that she slept unusually well for her. So there you are!"

"I scarcely know where I am. The ground has

given way beneath my feet. End this suspense at once!"

Two slim little arms slipped about his neck, and into his ear was spoken the name that he had waited to hear—that he would have waited longer than ten minutes on his very busiest morning to hear, if it were again to be spoken in that tone of unafraid adoration.

"You don't say so!" Romance has a way of sneaking off in the disguise of a disreputable tramp phrase. "How did you find out—for sure? Was she particularly restless?"

Comfort nodded importantly.

"She said that somehow even looking out at the stars didn't put her to sleep. She told me that they nearly always could."

"Bless her heart!"

"I saved her for the last and I was so 'fraid that I would cheat—because of course I wanted her to be the one all along—that I put the weentiest, teentiest little roseleaf of all under her mattress."

"It seems to me that the other side has no case whatever."

Comfort was perfectly satisfied with the smile that accompanied the words so she did not seek to penetrate their meaning.

"Don't you think that you could persuade your True Princess to take you to the park this afternoon? You could find the bench where we were last Sunday, couldn't you?"

"Oh, yes!" the child replied, clapping her hands. "I know she will take me if Stepmother can spare me. I could get my peeling done awful early. Will you be there? It's Saturday, you know."

"Why, so it is! Odd how those matters escape one, isn't it? Well, I shouldn't say anything about my coming if I were you because I should hate to have—anybody—disappointed into remaining at home, but I might chance upon you there while I am feeding the squirrels."

CHAPTER III

AT THAT very moment, in the tiny, skylight room far above them, the unconscious victim of this conspiracy lifted her weary eyes from the typewriter and caught sight of herself in the blurred and spotted mirror above the commode that served many purposes. The sight did not in the least reassure her. Had the unnatural pallor of her fair skin, the black circles beneath the large wistful brown eyes, and the tiny hollows that were appearing as mere shadows below the cheek-bones meant surcease from labour, in that bourne from which no traveller returns, she would not have cared In truth, she would have welcomed the thought—not morbidly, but wearily, as a tired child looks forward to the easement of the mother's breast at night. To the girl whose slight body was refusing, after a desperately brave struggle, to endure further its burden of grief and travail of brain and nerve force, however, the sight meant merely the slipping away of her fragile hold upon daily bread.

It is one of the blessings of life that loosing one's grasp does not mean the final rest from labour, but only a temporary disqualification for work, and in consequence hospital bills, and a weary battling to get back only so far as that same precarious position that one let go so readily before. Faced with a prospect like this, the grasp instinctively tightens, and thus many a castaway in the strenuous business of life has been able to hold on until the Good Ship Fortune loomed in the offing to carry him safely into the harbour where he fain would be.

It was so with Katherine Woods. To her mind there appeared no good reason why the burden of Self that she bore heavily just now should be thrust to the shoulders of others upon whom she had no claim, as the saying goes—for who indeed believes that there is one in the world that has no claim upon us?

There was a knock at the door and Comfort poked her head in, following it stealthily by her slim little body, wedging it through the discreet opening she had made to avoid a squeak of the hinge, and arriving at the side of the girl at the typewriter in two lengthy, tiptoed strides.

"'Scuse me for disturbing you," she apologized

breathlessly, 'but I snook the morning paper for you! Also a norange."

Katherine Woods took the offering with a smile, and retained the little hand, pressing it lovingly against her cheek.

"Thank you, dear little Fairy-godmother," she said softly. "If only all the world were as thoughtful of others and as loyal as you!"

Comfort clasped the brown head in a sudden squeeze.

"Everybody in the whole wide world better be nice to you!" she exclaimed in half threat. "They just better be—an' they would if they knew something I know!"

The girl smiled. "What do you know?"

"Something 'bout you that you never guessed I found out!"

There was a trace of anxiety in the glance that the wistful eyes suddenly flashed at her. It was not lost upon Comfort who gleefully hopped from one foot to the other with a mysterious air to enhance the effect of her secretiveness.

"I just guess Stepmother won't be saying any more that you're as dumb as if you didn't have no—'any,' I mean—'any' tongue (only Stepmother says 'no'), when anybody starts talking about relatives."

Comfort was so busy with her own considerations that she did not note the shadow which fled across the face before her. "I don't know if I'll tell her or not," she added thoughtfully. "I think I'll wait until I find the Prince. I'll flabbergast her more that way."

"But surely you will tell me?"

"Oh, dear me, yes, because you see you're—It!" The child's curls, with their rich bronze glints, mingled with the soft, dusky brown mass at once too fine and too heavy to remain dutifully confined in conventional coiffure. "You are the one I've been waiting for for ever and ever so long!" (the whisper was tremendously dramatic), "the—True—Princess!"

"Dearest little maid, what new fairy story is this?"

"Oh, it's not a new one It's a very, very, vee-ry old one, my Mama said when she told it to me. It was always the one that was last before I went to bed, and now I tell it to my Fairy-baby every night. I'd 'most forgotten it till my Fairy-baby came," was the sighing admission.

Miss Woods knew about Fairy-baby, and her manner to Cricket, ever since knowing about it, had been so tender that his heart had leaped into vain hope.

"I am quite sure that I do not know the True Princess fairy story, dear."

So Comfort told her all about it, and how she had discovered her wonderful secret.

"You see it doesn't matter a bit that you didn't know you were," she explained in anxious haste. "The True Princess in the story didn't either. She thought she was just like other people, and she was —outside. It's insides that she was a Princess. My Mama said it was the insides that mattered. I had a hunch as soon as I found out that you were different from the other boarders—inside. If it had been the outside, it would of been either Stepsister or Cook. I don't know which one is the most *chick.*'

Comfort had a heterogeneous vocabulary made up of the favourite phrases of Mrs. Prouty's boarders, and Miss Woods had struggled, vainly, in the work of elimination. The current coin of the Blithedale "emporium's" realm in the expression of vacuity of thought sounded so odd from the lips of the serious-eyed lassie that Cricket had more than once answered the glance of amusement from Miss Woods's deep brown eyes with a comradely twinkle.

The heavy tread of a dragging step was heard upon the stair and Comfort stood bolt upright with ears attentive.

"Jiminy Christmas!" she exclaimed in a whisper. "Look who's here! Stepmother! And I haven't a single dish wawshed! Would it be sneakety to slip downstairs while she's at the upper end of the hall?"

Miss Woods's heart yearned over the motherless little waif upon whose head was visited the punishment not only for her own childish sins but for the omissions and commissions of those whom Mrs. Prouty held dearer. Moreover, the heavy step brought dread to her on her own account for it was again Saturday and her week—the second unpaid-for week—was "up." She sped to the door and turned the key in the lock. The child looked at her curiously, with a half-wondering disappointment, and without knowing exactly why, Miss Woods turned the key back again. Comfort drew a long breath. Then she laughed aloud.

"We were just pretending that we were afraid of her!" she exclaimed gaily, adding with a trace of the anxiety that had shone in her eyes an instant before, "weren't we, True Princess?"

The older girl put a hand on the rumply curls and gazed down at her with an inscrutable expression.

"We were, Fairy-godmother," she said quietly.

The child pressed her hand and ran out into the corridor.

"I'm just going down to wawsh the dishes, Stepmother," Miss Woods heard her call blithely. "I'm dreadfully sorry I'm so poky this morning. I wouldn't blame you if you were 'zasperated."

"Fairy-godmother," the girl in the skylight room whispered to herself, "Mr. Cricket was right in naming you!"

And then, just because a woman's heart has a fashion of brimming over through her eyes, she hastily took up the paper that Fairy-godmother had "snook" for her, and tried to remember that True Princesses are dauntless.

The first words which met her gaze, however, held her tense, and she locked her small teeth together in grim hatred. Brown eyes flashed fire.

The item which had this astonishing effect was the bit of news concerning the return of Mr. Charles Edward Martin.

. . . . . .

Oddly enough, at that same moment, Mr. Martin opened his eyes in a listless gaze upon the gray drizzle without. The murky dreariness seemed but an emanation of his gloomy spirit into the larger universe. He extended a shapely but capable hand

with sensitively tufted fingertips, and rang for his man.

"Doctor's horders were not until after nine at least, sir." The man was the other's elder by many years. In fact, in point of service, Bland bore the proud distinction of being the oldest of all the gentlemen's men in the Martin set. Seldom, in this country of men born equal, and of constant fearful struggling to hide the fact, can two generations of a family boast the same servant. Yet Bland had served the elder Martin as well as he was now serving his son.

"I don't care a hang what 'doctor's orders' are, Bland"—yet the young master's irritability was tinged with friendliness, that note of true breeding. "I'm having my regular tub at my regular time this morning. I slept scarcely a wink and it will rest me. Moreover, when that's done, I shall lie on the couch in there and have my regular—smoke." The man started to speak, his horrified expression revealing the tenor of his approaching comment.

"Now, shut up Bland! My nerves won't stand a tussle with you this morning. I know a lot more about myself than the doctor does. Do as I tell you and it will come out right."

CHAPTER IV

JOHN CARRUTHERS sounded the buzzer in the outer office and, as the door of his private sanctum opened, he shoved a pile of manuscripts toward the far edge of his desk.

"Letters with those—pencilled notes attached, Mrs. Ogden."

Silently the tall, slender young woman, whose bearing at once seemed to repel by an instinctive defiance, took up the pile of rejected stories, which, having passed safely the hurdles of the various readers, had now been refused by the somewhat fastidious Mr. Carruthers. On Saturday, moreover, he was unusually critical.

She glanced at the top one and started. Then, quite unexpectedly, she said softly: "I am glad that Katherine Woods is to have a personal letter. May I express it as I like?"

"I trust to your judgment. Do you know Miss Woods?"

"N-not exactly. No, I don't know her, but I have read all that she has sent in. She writes—well, I think."

"She will never adorn our pages, that's sure, until she can find cheerfuller themes. Love with her is one long-drawn-out tragedy."

"Well . . . isn't it?"

Mr. Carruthers looked at her in surprise. There was an intensity of bitterness in her tone that made him consider more carefully this one of many office stenographers. He was not an old man, but he was fatherly and her tone hurt this fatherliness.

"No, my dear child, it is not." Then he remembered that the prefix was, despite her youth, that of a matron, and he asked gently: "Your husband is—dead?" She bit her lip and inclined her head in the slightest possible movement. He instantly swerved his eyes to the window with its view of the uninteresting jaggedness of roof lines. "I am—sorry. That of course is a platitude and all I can offer is another platitude: Death, Mrs. Ogden, is not Love's tragedy."

She looked at him with a clear, level gaze. "I realize that, Mr. Carruthers, more fully than you do."

There was a fearlessness, a quality of outward frankness, covering a sensitive reserve that was new to Carruthers in women. This girl had about her the defiant abandon of one of the types that he

liked to study, with that dignity of rare breeding characteristic of the only other sort that interested him.

Carruthers was not a man of easily aroused interests. He was rather of the type whose very analyzing of the great emotions of his human fellows, and whose constant test upon the touchstone of Self of the imaginary experiences through which his blue pencil followed his mind day after day, had tended to drive, far within the reaches of his being, simpler human feelings.

"I'll wager that J. D. couldn't hold up his end in a love scene to save his life," was the way the assistant put it, "but he can spot a false note in one before he has got to it."

The assistant, bye the bye, appeared at the sanctum door at that moment and was struck by the quality of interest in the look which his superior was just then bending upon Mrs. Ogden. "Has Miss Katherine Woods come to you often?" Carruthers asked him.

"Er—three times. I passed them all on because I wanted you to get a notion of her style. If she could only cheer up, I'd pick her as a winner. She has the dramatic instinct and knows people."

"Tell her that, Mrs. Ogden. Send that letter

to me for signature. That's all." His eyes followed her out—a matter which was not lost upon Mr. Reeves. Mr. Reeves was, as Carruthers himself put it, a nice boy from Chicago whose newspaper work there had overcome the faults of his literary debauches at Harvard.

"Did you know that Mrs. Ogden was taking Miss Harden's place for a few days?" (Miss Harden, it might be noted, in passing, was the first hurdle.) "She's all right, too." Reeves was enthusiastic.

For some inscrutable reason John Carruthers was pleased. Moreover, he was immediately ashamed that he was pleased, because Miss Harden had been with the office much longer than he had and was supposed to be most efficient.

"Miss Harden ill? I didn't know she was out."

"Nearly a week. Tonsilitis. I'm getting it myself."

"Good Lord, man!" Carruthers's ejaculation was not entirely commiserative. "Don't desert the ship just at this present time."

"Won't if I can help it. I'm gargling like a Scotchman who is being treated to whisky, but the thing has got me, I fear. I'm good for a few days more, however. Elliot's got the gist of the plans so that he can jump right in. If worst came to worst, you

could borrow or steal a man for Elliot's desk. He would need only decent judgment of what the dear public wants, and keen sense of style. I don't think that Elliot's fussy enough, myself. Some of the most dependables are putting stuff over on us that I won't stand for much longer." He came to a sudden pause, grinning. "'Tis well that I require greater purity of language written than spoken, is't not?"

Carruthers smiled at his boyishness. "Throat bad?" he inquired with the fatherly air habitual to him.

"Not very; it's the confounded pain under my shoulder blade that bothers me most—but I'll be all right in a day or so. How about the illustrations for 'Clarice'? Like 'em?" And they were soon as deeply engrossed in discussing forthcoming numbers as was Mrs. Ogden in composing a letter to Miss Katherine Woods which was to bear the somewhat illegibly scrawled signature of John D. Carruthers, Editor.

CHAPTER V

MRS. PROUTY was not in her most enviable mood that morning. As Miss Woods appeared simultaneously with the clanging of the outer door after Miss Vincent, the sallow face with its heavy cheeks emerged from the folds of the morning paper. There was little news on Monday.

"Well," in a carefully acidulated tone, "down in plenty of time for the mail man, ain't you?"

Cricket suddenly decided to have another cup of coffee and surreptitiously unfolded his napkin, nodding a most cheery good morning to the newcomer.

"That breakfast food is not half bad this morning, Miss Woods," he ventured, serenely oblivious of lowering storm clouds. "I am sure Fairy-godmother has some warm for you in the kitchen."

"That breakfast was plenty warm enough for those that pay regular and I guess it will do for them that don't," observed Mrs. Prouty. "If people will come down late to avoid the other boarders they take their chance."

At that moment Comfort appeared with a small bowl of steaming porridge and a pitcher of cream which she placed before the girl with a delighted flourish.

"Well, well! A real fairy-godmother!" exclaimed Cricket in a tone that made Mrs. Prouty decide at once to defer her remarks to Comfort until he was well out of the way, and to appear absorbed in her paper.

"They ain't never a thing new in Monday's society colyum," she complained. "Jest the same things over. Here's about Charley Martin at the Plaza again without a word changed. I bet the Plaza pays fer it."

Comfort, who had been exchanging playful smiles with Miss Woods, caught the strange expression that suddenly hardened the lovely features, and regretfully saw her push away the breakfast food untasted.

"Wasn't it just terrible about his brother, though —bein' drowned that way when they was on their weddin' trip? Her, too. My, but she was pretty! Her pitcher was in the paper the day they was married."

"Hard luck!" Cricket was more interested in the untasted breakfast and its cause than in the tragedy of the Robert Martins.

"Nemesis!" Miss Woods exclaimed, half under her breath, passionately, as if the word had been forced from her.

Cricket kept counsel and wondered, while Mrs. Prouty looked at her uncomprehendingly. The word was one she did not know, but the tone in which it was spoken was quite evidently not flattering to the victims. In any event, Mrs. Prouty decided to follow her usual course and side with established wealth and position.

"I'm sure I felt as if it was one of my own family," she asserted with some belligerency. "I didn't know the younger brother much, but Mr. Charley Martin is a real prince."

Comfort, who had been absently catching a word now and then, let a dish fall with a crash.

"Oh—a really truly prince?" she demanded, so intently that Mrs. Prouty's glare was quite lost upon her.

"Stepmother means a prince in disguise, Fairy-godmother," Cricket offered.

"The disguise is perfect." Again Miss Woods spoke to herself and only Cricket heard.

"Where does he live?" demanded Comfort, in breathless suddenness.

"Don't you remember that great pile of a building

in front of which you were almost run over by a boy on a motor cycle? That's the Plaza."

"O-oh!" It was a soft little breath of revelation. "And to think that I never, never knew that it was the Palace a-tall!"

Her face aflame with inner visions, the child dreamily gathered up the dishes she had been piling, quite unconscious of their number, and attempted to lift the tray. Cricket sprang to her side in time to save the toppling china.

"I'll carry it for you, Fairy-godmother," he said gently. "It's a bit heavy for you." With a grateful smile at him Comfort led the way to the kitchen.

"If you could only know of all the wonderful things that he does," Mrs. Prouty was saying when he returned. "We had a cook once that was sister to the woman that was hired every year reg'lar to help the Martins spring clean, so I feel as if I knew the family real well. It makes a difference getting to know about folk first-handed Give? Why, they isn't anything that he *won't* give if he thinks it's a worthy charity. You always see his name in the paper for everything."

"I have noticed that." Miss Woods's tone was carefully non-committal. Even Cricket now detected no bitterness in it.

"Won't you" (he tried to keep his tone one of merely friendly interest) "try to eat a little breakfast? One works so much better." It was a crafty afterthought, and it brought results.

Mrs. Prouty had gone back to her paper, and was following her usual custom of commenting, audibly or with mutterings surcharged with meaning, upon the news therein contained. Cricket and Miss Woods, now well into a discussion of Arnold Bennett's versatility, were suddenly swept into her confidence by the raucous announcement:

"Girls is cert'ny fools!"

"Of course, Mrs. Prouty—but what new evidence to substantiate it?"

"Suicide of a beautiful young woman, deserted by her husband." She fairly snorted the headline. "That's her pitcher, too. Ain't she a beauty? And killin' herself for a man! I've always told Gladdus that they ain't no man on earth worth ruinin' your life for. If they sticks to you, well and good; if they ups and dies on you, get to work, if you have to, and earn somethin'—that's what I done, and look at me now! But if they deserts you, thank the Lord they've went, and you don't have to put up with 'em any longer."

"A most philosophic view to take of the matter, Mrs. Prouty."

"Well, it's good horse sense, anyway. I've hammered it into Gladdus good and plenty, too. She's awful pure and innocent, but she ain't no fool. Think of killin' yourself for one man when you've got looks. Here's your coffee, Miss Woods; it's cold as a stone but it was plenty hot for those that got down on time."

"I—don't mind the cold coffee, Mrs. Prouty," replied the girl gently, taking the cup and gazing with a curious intentness after the large billowy figure that lunged painfully upon fallen arches. It was not until the rasping voice, whose drawl could be so pleasant on occasion, was heard in altercation with the cook that she seemed to come to herself with a start.

"A penny for thoughts that must be worth millions."

The girl smiled at the half-jesting, half-earnest tone. It was a sad little smile and came slowly as if from a distance.

"I suppose that it would be difficult for—Mrs. Prouty—to understand how love could be so absolute, so complete, that, if it once lost faith, the whole world would seem to go—the whole world

of matter and spirit collapse—shatter at one's feet."

"I wonder," said Cricket, slowly, his eyes fixed on the street outside with its passing shadows of human life, "whether we do not underrate the privilege of love itself; whether we do not fail to realize that it is the bursting of the shell that is the miracle—the shell which we regard as our wall of safety, and which is, in truth, the prison house of our isolation from human joy. It makes one realize one's greatness—to love," he added simply.

"I am afraid that I never thought of it in quite that way." She tried to speak lightly, yet tenderly, as one would to a child that is pleading for what he may not have. "Something happened once—no matter what"—with a little rush of words that brought a loving smile to his lips at her girlishness—"something that made me afraid of it . . . of Love, I mean. It is beautiful but—it is very terrible, too."

"So is the sun, so is the wind, beautiful and terrible; but oh! how they release the wonders hid in the earth during the winter prison house of cold!"

"Do you suppose that our spiritual body fairly rushes into bud and bloom under its warmth and

joy?" The query was dreamily whimsical. After all—why not? He was dear to her—in a way.

"I know that it does—Katherine!" He leaned across the table and laid his hand upon hers.

"Oh, Mr. Gnome," Comfort's voice sounded suddenly from the doorway, where she was polishing a goblet vigorously, "do you think that he is a truly prince?"

Katherine Woods gave a little gasp and drew back with a white, startled face. Her hands locked themselves in her lap, and Cricket realized in a flash that his moment was gone.

"Er—who?" he asked dully.

"The man who lives in the Palace."

"Oh—the Martin chap?" He roused himself into interest. "Well, he certainly has money enough to keep a kingdom going quite respectably. Why are you trying to locate a prince?"

"For the True Princess, of course. True princesses never marry anybody else. Nobody else would be good enough, would they?" with a beautiful disregard of the grammar carefully instilled into her mind by royal words.

Cricket turned upon his vis-à-vis a pleading look. The girl flushed hotly in a glorious wave of colour and laughed a little.

"Fairy-godmother, you are a dear, but you are almost embarrassing at times. You are forcing Mr. Cricket into a corner so that he must needs say something pretty."

Comfort gazed from one to the other anxiously. She felt sensitively that she had displeased her two best friends, yet she could not quite understand. Cricket, silent, turned away to the window with a grave face and the child slipped over to him in instinctive sympathy, stealing her fingers into his palm.

"I'm sorry," she said, softly, "about—whatever it is."

Cricket patted the hand gently. "You need not be sorry, Fairy-godmother," he said. "You may have helped your True Princess more than you think. Tell her, dear, that you are quite right—that it must be a prince—but that ofttimes a mere commoner can be transformed into a prince—if one cares."

It was all very puzzling indeed and Comfort felt that her fairy powers were greatly needed; but just how to use them she did not know.

"No . . ." her True Princess was saying breathlessly, protestingly.

"Oh, no! . . . Don't let me lose the best

friend that I have, Fairy-godmother. Tell him not to—that he must not. . . ."

Had those two dear sensible charges of her fairy wardship suddenly gone daft? Comfort felt helpless—but she must follow out her Princess's bidding.

"She's the Princess," she said mechanically, "and she says to—not."

"But we must tell her" (he spoke quite to the child without a glance at the table) "now that we have gone so far, that if I were a prince, I would lay my kingdom at her feet . . . but that, suddenly, Fairy-godmother makes us see ourselves as we are. . . ."

"*Please*," pleaded Miss Woods, helplessly, her great eyes fixed upon him. But he must make one point—for her sake—and he was blind to her gaze.

"Tell her, Fairy-godmother," he went on without heeding her—indeed quite as if she were not there —"that of all your kingdom, gnomes, when they will, can be the most helpful, just because they are such odd, ill-favoured, and stunted little creatures that no one mistakes them for princes. If a true princess would only realize that all they can do is an occasional kind little act, she would surely be gracious enough not to refuse their so kindly meant services."

There was something very like a sob from the

table. Cricket loosed the small hand and went to the door.

"Oh, dear, oh, *dear!*" wailed Fairy-godmother, forgetting her magic powers when there was most call for them—thereby proving herself wonderfully like human folk. "I'm sorry that everybody I love is sorry—and that I don't know how to help 'em."

"Mr. Cricket!" (What lovely soft voices true princesses can have, to be sure!) "Please—let me say something. I—I know what you mean about—my not being gracious. Please don't say that I'm not. You have been so kind. You have found things for me to do where there were no things! I know—now. I appreciate it more than I can ever—say. But what Mrs. Prouty told me is true: it is charity. You need not have your work done outside your office, in the first place; and if you did, there are others who will do it more accurately and more—cheaply—than I have been doing it. I did not know—until I started out to find more work of the same kind. My work is not sufficiently good for competition. I must try—something else. Mrs. Prouty has been very kind to me." [Cricket made an odd noise in his throat.] "She has let me stay on until to-day." She swallowed bravely and smiled up at

him. "I may possibly not be here this evening, Mr. Cricket; some friends have been wanting me to visit them. They have a very quiet home, I am told—where I can rest. If I am gone"—she held out her hand in a friendly gesture—"good-bye—until I see you again."

"May I come to see you?" the query was eager—almost impassioned.

"Some time," she replied evasively. "Wait—until you get permission." A little catch in her voice destroyed the artificial bravado of the words. He wondered. A thought too terrible to be contemplated flashed through his mind—but it was dismissed swiftly, and with shame. Of course she had friends. Why should he doubt? Possibly there was a man in this family of friends.

"I hope" (it was formal indeed—that tone of his) "that you are not going to leave us. I am going to think that I shall find you here and that we shall have some sort of a lark this evening together. Will you?"

Again she smiled that inscrutable smile. "If I am here," she said. "It depends—on what I receive by this morning's post. I shall not go unless I feel that I—must."

"O Fairy-godmother, Fairy-godmother," he cried softly, and, as so often, the deep tones in his voice

seemed to throb with a hurt that he hid under jesting, "why can't you turn a gnome into a prince?"

"It seems to me" (Comfort looked after him as he waved at them through the window from the area way) "that he is as princy as a real prince . . . and he *is* nice."

"Yes—oh, yes!" Miss Woods was young and, though her heart was wrung with the pity of it, there was a little glow in her breast—the vision of a flame that would not kindle. "If niceness were all that is needed!"

"What else is?" Comfort was unexpectedly direct.

"I—I don't know," helplessly. "Something that —somebody else will discover in him—that I never can. Only—I must go."

"Oh, there's the postman, True Princess! Is it a thick package or a thin one that you want?" As the man in uniform handed her a pile of assorted sizes.

"A thin envelope, Comfort—one that looks as if it had a long, thin, narrow slip of paper in it"; the girl's hands gripped until her knuckles shone white, and in sudden fear she turned her eyes away from the child, bowing her head as a pagan might beseech his gods to avert disaster. "Oh, Fairy-godmother, Fairy-godmother, give me the right one—give me the right one! It means my very life, child!"

With back turned toward her, the child sorted the mail, tossing aside the letters for other members of the household and, with a sidelong glance to assure herself that she was not discovered, she slipped two long thick packets upon the sill and sat upon them with well-feigned nonchalance.

"Here!" she cried delightedly, "here is a skinny one, Princess!"

The girl rose and hastily took it from the child's hand, then her arms fell nervelessly at her side. It flaunted the black-typed return stamp of a down-town department store, and the cheap paper of the envelope could not conceal the lurid letter head of the sheet folded within. The disappointment in the big brown eyes was in itself a tragedy.

"An advertisement from a store where I never bought anything in my life," she exclaimed bitterly, as if this were almost pressing in the thorns of the crown. "How beautifully ironical! Anything would have been better than this!" A sudden flashing of guilt upon the flowerlike little face before her sent a thought darting into her mind.

"Is that all that there was for me, Fairy-godmother?"

The child looked up at her with wide, anguished

eyes, her little hands clasped tight in her lap. She was sitting very still.

"Is this—all, Comfort?" The sad eyes looked at her hopeless yet stern.

Oh! if she were indeed a fairy-godmother! If she could only turn thick packages, that bulged with things people did not want, into skinny envelopes that were slenderly full of something they did—something that, as her princess had said but a moment before, meant her very life!

"Couldn't thick packages possiss-ibly have something nice in them?" she queried, pleading, "not possiss-ibly? They must have, True Princess, for I've prayed every night—every single-wingle night—just as my Mama told me how."

"For—what, dear?" the query was infinitely soft, as if tears were cuddling it about.

"For—money for you," she said simply. "I s'pose it's because God doesn't have to have money that He doesn't know about it," she said as if to herself. "Mama said that He'd put it into people's hearts to do things, though. It's queer. I tried to 'splain it to Him. I told Him that money didn't seem like much when you didn't have to have it—but when you did, it was some'n fierce." The childish voice was so intense, so choked with utter dis-

couragement, that the older of the two children who could not understand the Father's ways tried to comfort her.

"It will be all right, dear. Give me the rest that you have for me. Surely—surely there will be a grain of comfort in them."

Slowly the child drew from beneath her skirts the two packets, bearing the stamp of two excellent periodicals—as periodicals of the day went—and one of them was that of which John Carruthers was editor. Had not the True Princess opened the other first and shaken from it the curt rejection slip that to her sensitive spirit never seemed less than a blow between the eyes, she might have taken greater hope at the careful analysis of her latest offering to Mr. Carruthers, conscientiously and lovingly wrought by the girl with the defiant eyes. It was an excellent critique, based on sound common sense and an appreciation—somewhat satirical, albeit—of what the public wants.

Yet Katherine Woods did not understand it. Criticism, however accurate and penetrating and able, was not what she must have, for it would not appease Mrs. Prouty. She had fought hard, but it was against too-great odds. Hampered at the outset by her very passion for succeeding, in order

that she might carry on a quest which to her meant all of life's purpose now, she was doomed to fail. High-strung, nervous, in her work she gave evidence of the unbalance of her spirit. She could not see things in right perspective. Her backgrounds—if indeed there were backgrounds, and, not, rather, a cluttering of objects that strove for prominence—gave no hint of the largeness of her human outlook, no suggestion of depth in the reaches of her spirit—in the atmosphere of which her brain children might work out their destinies. And now—this was the end! Mrs. Prouty had given her until to-day—the beginning of a new week—to make her peace with her in the only way that peace may be made with landladies of exclusive boarding-houses. Nowhere could she go, for none would take her without the advance that was always demanded, and she was quite ignorant—as is the usual state of those who do not make a good living at indigency—of any philanthropic group that could give her aid. Besides, her very soul rebelled at the thought of asking help.

Night after night she had lain awake hoping to see some way clear. She had tried all the usual avenues open to those not skilled in any particular line of work, without success. It seemed to her now that only the one way was left—to join those

friends who were awaiting her, as she had told Cricket, in the quiet home that alone offered rest. Some said it was a coward's way—and it seemed so to those who did not know the vast temptation. Perhaps it was. . . . Yet life was very sweet and livable if one could only live it without shame.

Comfort had stolen softly from the room and the girl laid her brown head upon the table and strangled back the sobs.

"Oh, Mollie, my precious baby sister! If only I were sure that you are not living—that you would never need me—little Mollie girl! Dear God, let me know!"

In the tension of her emotion she had crushed the flaring envelope in her slim hand until its stiff, sharp corners pricked her tender palm. At the sound of the soft footfall returning she absently thrust it into the bosom of the blouse from which she extracted a handkerchief and surreptitiously wiped her eyes. Not soon enough, however, for Comfort had seen, and her soft heart was wrung with the pity of it. She slipped a warm little arm about the girl's bended head and pressed it close to her.

"Don't cry, dear, dear True Princess," she said with passionate pleading, adding in brighter tone: "See what I've got!" Upon the cloth in front of

them she spread a handful of coins, many of them pennies. "Thirty-seven cents! That's quite a lot, isn't it?" anxiously. "I've saved and saved all that Mr. Gnome has given me, and five cents that Miss Vincent paid for a nerrand; the pennies are mostly for errands for Stepsister when she was 'all in.' Now, I've gotta have five cents for subway for—something that I won't tell about—for I can walk one way . . . and a nother five cents I suppose," she sighed, "for salt."

The brown-eyed girl hugged her close.

"Salt, dearest?"

"Yes, Stepmother says I'm not worth my salt usually—so I thought I'd better buy her a bag. I ast the grocery man how much they were. I didn't know that I took so much salt."

"Poor lassie!"

The child moved the coins over in front of the other.

"But all the rest is yours! See! It's quite a lot, isn't it? It helps?"

"Oh, baby! Don't, don't!" The girl sobbed and held her fast.

"I suppose," said Comfort, slowly, a vague disappointment in her tone, "that, being a princess, it seems very small—smaller than it does to me!"

"Oh, no, no"—the child's curls were rumpled with

a passionate, nervous hand that seemed to long to express what the voice could not say. "You don't understand, dearest! It is—wonderful! Quite the biggest thing that was ever done for me. That is why I can't take it! You are like your Mr. Gnome! You are giving me too much. I cannot take all you have and give—nothing!"

There is a queer magnetism about odd assorted griefs that make them suddenly cling together and make one insupportable bundle.

The flushed little face fell and eyes looked gravely at her from beneath the tumbled curls.

"But it seemed so nice to be giving them to a true princess instead of the monkey that comes around with the Dago."

"But you see," the girl was quite helpless at making it clear, "it would be different if you had a great deal. If you were really a fairy godmother, and had so much that you didn't know what to do with it—or Mr. Cricket were a true prince with the wealth of a kingdom at his command. . . ."

She started suddenly to her feet for the sound of a dragging step on the stair was plainly heard.

She ran to the hat rack and snatched a worn little, black straw hat, and a shabby loose coat of the cut of two years before.

"Put them away, dear heart," she said, forcing a smile into her pale lips. "Your true princess is going to take a bit of a walk and think things out." She went to the child and put her arms about her. "I'm afraid I'm a very ungrateful true princess," she said gently, "but some day—when you are older—you may understand, though may your good fairies keep you from understanding through experience!" She kissed the wistful little face many times, and then, with a sob, fled through the door and out upon the street.

Comfort stood where her princess had left her—thinking deeply. "If he were a true prince—the wealth of a kingdom at his command . . . " (those very words she had said), then she would have taken help. Still pondering, the child took the coins and slipped them into the pocket of the huge apron as Mrs. Prouty came in.

"He's surely at the Palace, isn't he?" Comfort demanded. Unlucky choice of time to put such an unpractical-sounding query for it aroused the wrath of "Stepmother" which had been slumbering but to gain power with such refreshment.

For a space of several bitter minutes the little head, but just now cuddled in loving arms, was subjected to a tirade such as she had seldom had to

endure before. The big gray eyes, however, which had filled with tears at the sight of her beloved's grief, now gazed steadily, with a kind of wondering hurt, at the hideous sight of a middle-aged woman completely in the control of her rage. A stinging box on the ears brought smarting tears and a straight firm line to the sensitive lips as she went to the kitchen and plunged her arms into the chilled dish water. She kept her counsel.

She had not, in reality, minded any of the harsh words that related to herself. Those that burned in her memory were the cruel taunts flung out against her princess. But there was in her heart a thought that kept her silent and even brought a queer little smile of triumph to her lips as she lifted the kettle of boiling water and rinsed the greasy dishes.

"What are you grinning at?" Mrs. Prouty had followed her out. Her rage was almost spent, an occasional rumble articulating into audible mutterings.

"I was thinking" (Fairy-godmother's tone was almost gleeful although there was a red mark still across the childish cheek), "I was thinking how mor-ti-fied and 'shamed you would be when the Prince came and found out about you."

Such was the quiet assurance of her voice that

Mrs. Prouty instinctively started. Suppose the child were to unearth some relatives that were worth while? What might she not have lost by her hasty temper?

"Who—what are you talking about? Who's going to bring a prince here? What for?"

"To rescue the True Princess out of your clutches." Comfort dabbled the water thoughtfully as she used the most approved fairy-tale phrasing. "I'm going to do it if it takes a leg," she added with sudden gusto; then, gently rubbing the smarting cheek, "though I will say that being fairy godmother in a bunch like this is no slouch of a job."

Yet even she did not know the magnitude of her task and the sore need for swift manipulating of destiny.

CHAPTER VI

NO ONE can judge Katherine Woods in her desperate mood unless he—and it may be that her severest judges are likely to be "she"—has found himself in similar circumstances. One who is a mere chronicler of her may not defend, but one may set forth a few bits of her history which serve to explain the hopelessness of her mood—the bitterness of her cry against Fate.

Tucked in her pocket—at the moment when, with the nerves of her slender, delicate body throbbing with the pain of her spirit, she dashed out of the clanging basement door at Mrs. Prouty's—was a flat, square box filled with innocent-looking whitish tablets. As she had told the anxious Cricket, she needed quiet—and was going to her friends. Had she climbed to her stuffy skylight room instead of out into a sunlit May morning, one may feel reasonably certain that the tablets in the box would have been fewer right soon, and one more labourer would have failed the Master of the Harvest.

She had walked a long, reckless distance ere she

found herself in the Park and wearily dropped upon a bench in an out-of-the-way corner. She had had no definite purpose in going there. She was not by nature dramatic, and she did not, in an orgy of feminine heroics, plan a dramatic end. If she could have crept away without any one's knowing of it, she had been glad. The thought of the uniformed figure bending over her, a subsequent sounding of loud gongs, and a hurrying away with more excitement than she had ever caused in her quiet, shy little life, terrified her mental vision. No, it must be the skylight room where they would not miss her until. . . . A little flowerlike face, with wide, anguished eyes dilated in terror, rose before her.

No; it must not be Fairy-godmother! That brave little soul with the singing heart would have to learn many of life's sordid, weary lessons, doubtless —but the most wearisome, the most sordid, must not come through her. Her True Princess—a sob rose in the girl's throat—must not be the one to show her that there were no such things as fairies in a hard-headed, obtuse, and cruel old world; that prayers to the One who, after all, the child regarded as an all-powerful and beneficent fairy, were but phrases that echoed in mocking hills of unheeding matter.

She would simply disappear; that would be the way. Then a rush of memory overcame her with the thought. It had been *her* way, too—that baby sister—in search for whom she had spent the tiny sum realized from the sale of the home in Virginia when the invalid mother died.

None knew better than the girl on the park bench how terrible is the strain of a fruitless seeking for one who may be either living or dead. Over and over again she had said that to feel sure—to know—that Mollie was dead would be all that she would ask.

It had not been a wild-goose chase for fame or dollars, this quest upon which little Mollie Woods had left the Virginia rectory that the kindly folk of her father's church had insisted on their keeping even after the death of the brilliant scholar who had preached simple, straightforward things during his life. She had gone to the city of delicious unrest at the summons of an old friend of her mother's whose children needed a governess of the sort that Mollie Woods could be. With the Binghams Mollie had gone abroad—a dream come true it seemed to the two gentle, joyous-hearted women in the old rectory as they read the glowing letters, bubbling with fun and shafts of keen-witted satire over manners and customs that were different from those in the accus-

tomed pigeon hole. Then the vacation at home, whose joyful reunion was shadowed by the faintest little cloud: Mollie had met "some one very powerful" in the world of the stage; he had heard her singing in the salon one night—an absurd imitation it had been of a well-known grand opera star. He had sought her out, had made an offer, and Mrs. Bingham, herself a prominent dabbler in the uplift of the stage, had urged its acceptance. It was a wonderful future, an almost unparalleled opportunity—the children were growing older so rapidly. Raymond must have a tutor next year . . . and Mollie had gone back to New York with the hesitating but complete permission that she had sought.

As she sat there idly watching the shadows of tender leaves upon the grass, Katherine remembered the brilliant eyes, the flush of joy upon the younger girl's face. So sure she had been of triumph that the shabby old rectory had glowed in the sunlight of her vision. She was to do wonderful things for them—the big-eyed elder sister, and the gentle little mother who for long years had lain upon the couch. Then came a flash of realization—Katherine liked to remember that Mollie had had that—and the sitting room with its worn carpet and old-fashioned furniture was flooded with newspaper

clippings from New York dailies. Critics were as nearly unanimous as critics can be in praise of the new little satellite.

They prophesied wonderful things for her in—perhaps—only another year. The illness of the little, white-haired invalid becoming acute, Katherine's time was taken up in nursing her, in fighting back the great shadow that hovered for long in the little white bedroom. During that period even the beloved story-writing was given up with its desultory encouragement in the form of varying payment that purchased little comforts for the one she held to life.

Had not anxious days and sleepless nights been filled with the one thought, Katherine felt that she might have divined the impending tragedy from the brief letters of the little sister in New York. In the cry that comes to a woman's lips more often than to a man's, she voiced the passionate realization of her insufficiency. "Oh—if I could only have been two!" It was the cry wrung from her on the day when, returning to consciousness from a collapse as the empty rectory opened its cheerless door to her black-robed figure, her sister's letter was given into her hands.

When she had read the only too ordinary little story

written there, the real strength in the character of Katherine Woods showed itself. She did not fall weakly back upon her pillow. Instead she called a counsel of all her bodily and spiritual powers. "You must not fail me," she said to them as actually as in words when she eagerly partook of the strengthening foods she had refused before, and put away for another time the grief that threatened to overwhelm her.

She must find Mollie! Surely, surely, the child could not have carried out the purpose hinted at in her letter! At the last moment the blackness of the waters might have held her back, or some fugitive teaching of the saintly faced old scholar in her wayward childhood days!

Within the week Katherine Woods, a shadow of a girl, in black, was in the shabby apartment house to which she had been sending the letters to her sister. It was the only clue she had to the life that Mollie had been living for many months; that and a pitiful evidence of the little sister's truthfulness in her sorry little story—a copy of the wedding certificate issued by a justice of the peace in New Jersey affirming the marriage of Robert O. Martin and Mary Lee Woods. The sad little letter ran thus:

He is, in reality, only twenty—no older than I, and his brother Charles is his guardian. Bob told me that he would be twenty-

two next month. . . . The brother, I have not seen. I read his letter; that was enough . . . I did not know that men could be so cruel. . . . The lawyer—the Martin attorney—explained it all to me. He was kind—at least he wanted to be—but he said that it would be no use to fight it. Charles Martin had millions to spend, and he would spend it all if necessary to "get his brother out of the scrape and protect the family name." Think of it! As if I were a cheap adventuress instead of a girl who had given up an assuredly brilliant future for love of him! I just can't bear it, Kitkat, I've disgraced you all, or I should if I tried to fight my way out of it. . . . I think it's the realization that Bob is a coward that hurts most—that the sensitiveness, the boyishness, that I loved so are just—weakness. I can't live—nameless—nor can I let Father's grandchild come into such a cruel world unprotected. It is better this way. I'll just drop out. Remember me as I was at home. Only two of the girls in the company guessed about Bob and me, and I'm hoping they will not tell—for they actually *know* nothing. It would be a mess for the papers and bitterly hard for Mother and you. Don't try to find the wretched little fragment of a body that was once—your Mollie-girl.

P. S. They may try to offer you money; they did me, but—well, I imagine that your answer will be the same.

Two years Katherine had spent in searching; two years, and all the money that she had; but on this May morning when, with an icy little hand tightly clutching the white box in her pocket, she sat on the bench in the park, she was no nearer solving the mystery of her sister's whereabouts than on the day when she had arrived in the dingy apartment building and questioned, dry eyed, the floridly

weeping girls who, too, had come to seek her out. They were the two "of the company" who had guessed the secret, and as she talked with them Katherine had little hope of her sister's name being kept out of publicity when a story promised in which they might be interviewed. Her fears did not prove groundless, yet the little story was so much like a hundred others which the same journal had published during those months that, save when the marriage of Robert Martin recalled it of late, it had been forgotten along with the rest.

A bit of fortune, which saved Katherine Woods's identity with "the sister" becoming known, was the fact that not even those who knew Mollie best had the glint of knowledge that her name was not in reality the "Mary Lee" which appeared in the cast.

It is always the outwardly inconsequential matters that seem, in the end, to have been fraught with the greatest moment. Now, though it seemed that nothing short of a miracle could lure the girl into thinking that life held any possibility for her, that there could be anything ahead of her save the bitterness of ending the struggle—whether swiftly, by the means that she had at hand, or slowly, through lack of shelter and food (a bit of flotsam

like those she had so often yearned over in a square in the heart of the rushing city)—a tiny incident changed the course of her purpose, so well on its way toward completion. Unconsciously her hand fumbled the square white box in her pocket and a bright-eyed gray squirrel, his sharp little ears detecting the sound which could have but one meaning for him, crept stealthily upon the bench. How far apart were they—these children of nature whom an artificial civilization had deprived of some part of the ability to deal with forces in order to satisfy their primal needs, and had cast upon the chance philanthropy of a passer-by? The advantage was in favour of the squirrel; he, at least, had no bitter memories to weaken his desire to live, and his faith in humanity only revived in greater strength after every rebuff.

In a desperate tension of mood which rendered her deaf and blind to the sounds and sights about her—an alienation of spirit in which naught existed in the universe save her own soul and the little box in her pocket—the brushing of soft fur against her ungloved hand, in its sudden unexpectedness, brought a smothered scream of terror. The bright-eyed squirrel, in an alarm proportionately no less, leaped to the ground and scampered up the nearest tree, to

pause, safe out of possible harm's way, upon a low-swung branch, his hunched shoulders quivering like those of a bent little old man leaning upon his cane.

Katherine's quivering nerves were so utterly on the surface at that moment that the stray wind of any emotion swept over them, drawing forth a melody of its own nature. The hurt of the innocent little creature above her brought a rush of passionate sympathy and remorse. She thrust her hands deep into her pockets in the hope of finding there what would make her peace with the other little waif. Mockingly the white box rattled again and the girl shuddered. Somehow its evil suggestion grated harshly upon her present sudden mood of service. There was nothing there. She rose unsteadily to her feet and looked up at the little bunch of fur.

"I haven't anything to give you, squirly," she said pleadingly, "but I hope that you'll forgive me for frightening you so!" As she lowered her eyes, the glint of a small, light coloured object in the grass caught her gaze, and she pounced upon it with a surge of delight. She held it up with a sudden gesture that somehow did not frighten her friend. "Oh, look," she called gently, scraping the rough

shell with her pink nail in an alluring sound, "a peanut, squirly—a peanut you never saw!"

Cautiously yet surely, the crouching fur descended until within reaching distance of the proffered tidbit; then, with a sudden snatching, he had it in his mouth and had fled up the tree. The girl drew a long breath of delight and looked about her as if upon a new world—or as if returning to an old friend whose kindliness of feature she had forgotten in drear years of absence that had intervened.

The sun was now shining in the lustrous warmth of early May, the softest of breezes cooled her hot cheeks, and a robin sang blithely not far away. With a vicious little heel she kicked up a bit of turf at her feet, falling upon her knees and patting it gently as if she had hurt it. Lifting up a ragged end of it, she hid beneath it the square white box and pressed the sod back into place with a worn little shoe.

"Perhaps," she said to herself with a little catch in her voice, "I'll find a peanut to give Mrs. Prouty."

For a long time she had been vaguely conscious of the letter which she had thrust hurriedly into the bosom of her blouse. Its cheap, crumply envelope had crackled protestingly at her every

move, had she been aware of things that smote her outer senses. Now the discomfort of its pricking her delicate bosom caused her to draw it forth. A less orderly nature than hers might have then and there torn it to bits and scattered them broadcast about the greensward, but not so Katherine Woods. She slipped it in her pocket with the swift choking thought that it would have been the means of her identification if. . . .

Withdrawing it, she tore the envelope open mechanically and drew out the glaringly letter-headed sheet—with an enclosure! The sheet with the letter head had been taken from the women's waiting room and bore no word. It was folded carefully around a half sheet of typewriter paper from which fell out, as Katherine breathlessly flattened it, something that startled her more than the squirrel's friendly appeal had done, though no sound escaped her. Bewildered she read the words typewritten upon the unheaded sheet and weakly compared them with the typewritten address that they might yield some clue.

The "something" that she unfolded was a bank note so new that its only creases had been made by the hand that folded the paper, and large enough to cover her debt to Mrs. Prouty with a tiny margin

for stamps! The words written seemed to leap to her, at once with the sweetest solace and the bitterest reproach:

"For Katherine Woods, whose courage has helped a woman she does not know."

CHAPTER VII

THE suite of Charles Edward Martin—in the hotel where he had chosen to stay during the few days that preceded his seclusion (under orders from his physicians) at his country home, Martindale—was individualized by the unmistakable touch of a connoisseur in art. Though his stay was to be brief—too brief, in fact, to warrant opening the town house and re-arranging its retinue—the faithful Bland, acting under explicit directions from his nervously irritable young master, had transformed the unpretentious, comfortable rooms into the veri-similitude of a home by punctilious selection of his favourite bits of furniture, his carefully chosen rugs, and certain art treasures from which it was actual pain for him to be parted. Ancient and modern, one would have said that they formed an oddly assorted group had one not had eyes to see that, period of workmanship quite aside, all possessed certain similar characteristics—strength of line and an indefinable spiritual beauty in their suggestion which, save in the hands

of a master, is so likely to become mere maudlin sentimentality. Their selection was in itself a revelation of the character of the only surviving Martin. Himself the product of a civilization more effete than any in the world's history, in that the inventive brains of centuries have subserved its anticipated demands, he yet was limned in the inner man by strength of line that bespoke generations of sturdy, upstanding forbears.

As one who had run athwart him in Wall Street remarked with reasonable ruefulness, "Charley Martin may be a rich man's son—but anybody who thinks that he hasn't his Dad's head on his shoulders has a surprise coming to him."

Had Charles Martin heard this remark and believed it, part of the cause of his gloom on that bright May morning, when Katherine Woods was burying a certain little white box beneath the soil of Central Park, would have been swept away. Propped up among the cushions of his couch, magazines littered about him, his heavy eyes and colourless cheeks did not present the world's idea of an aristocratic young multi-millionaire whose simplicity in style of living was indulgently regarded by his friends as a forgivable whim rather than an expression of inner conviction.

Like a faithful hen with an ailing chick, Bland hovered ever near, yet with the well-bred servant's endeavour to be unobtrusive withal. Not a sigh escaped the young man which did not echo in the servant's breast; no weary droop of the body or listless attempt to interest himself in reading escaped the other's watchful, though oft-averted, gaze.

Far flung about the room were the most popular periodicals of the day, and as the one upon which the young man's eyes had been dully and unseeingly fixed followed its fellows, an onlooker would have had little trouble in guessing the means by which the others had arrived at their haplessly scattered state.

"Damn!" It was not a nice word, but then Charles Martin had no notion that it would be recorded thus to his disadvantage. He had not even intended Bland to hear—although, forsooth, that mattered little, Bland being both scapegoat and confidant.

The appearance of the servant from the inner bedroom was so sudden as to suggest a surreptitious listening.

"Did you call, sir?"

"No, Bland, I merely spoke my mind."

With a solicitude as tender as a mother's, Bland

came to the couch and rearranged the cushions behind the weary back.

"Did you wish for something, sir?"

"No, good old Bland." The eyes were lifted with an affection that would have repaid the man a thousand fold for a lifetime of service. "As if a fellow had only to wish!" he mused, adding, with a sigh: "How long have we been home, Bland?"

"We landed a week ago to-day, sir."

"Is that all; only a week?"

The elderly servant's eyes were pitiful, but his voice was stolidly cheerful:

"Time won't seem to drag so, sir, when you can get hout."

"Oh, I can get out, now, Bland. It's all rot saying that I can't. Doctors were made to give orders and to try new things on helpless patients. . . . I'm not ill in body, Bland; I'm sick of soul. . . . I wish that it were all over and done with"; the voice was gruff with pain. "I wish that *I* had sailed on the *Titanic* instead of—Bob." He turned his face away, and his hands fell listless in his lap.

"Don't say that, sir." Bland's tone was pleading.

"But, if it's true, why not say it, Bland? What am I here for? I have never paid much attention

to the whyness of the which before, but what is the use of me?"

"You're your father's son, sir." The thought with its suggestion of responsibility brought the younger man pause only for an instant. He burst forth with additional bitterness:

"His son in blood and bone, perhaps, but surely not in mind or in purpose of life! Why, when Dad was my age he had done things worth while; and when he went, he had accomplished a work in the world—work that needed to be done—not just stuff to take up his time."

It was a new phase of mood and the somewhat unresourceful and unimaginative Bland was at a loss how to meet it.

"There's the directors, sir."

A sound of utter scorn caught in young Martin's throat.

"Who most courteously ask me questions, to which I as courteously respond: 'Yes, gentlemen, if you think best.'"

Nothing to be gained along that line, was Bland's swift decision.

"You're your mother's own son for kindness, sir. Think of the charity."

"Nothing in the world could be wider apart in

spirit than my 'charity,' as you call it, and the mater's. She was the real, old-fashioned sort of gentlewoman. She visited the poor and the sick and the needy of heart and body. She had a list of retainers that she knew personally. None of your check-giving to organized societies to investigate and 'ameliorate' . . . She didn't 'ameliorate'—she helped. She taught by word and gift and example. She had the wild notion that those who had much and could follow out an ideal of right living had the responsibility of setting an example to which those less fortunate might approach as nearly as they could, with their eyes focussed upon real values, not upon extravagant, worthless fripperies. Why, Mother was three generations behind her times! She lagged so far that she didn't fit in any place but—Heaven. Four women like her, with her pluck and indomitable purpose, could make over social New York."

There was nothing to do but let him crystallize into words the meditations that were consuming him, Bland decided, with a half-sensed realization that the tragedy of his brother's death had brought to him long, long thoughts.

"And how people loved her, to be sure! All sorts of people! You saw how it was at her funeral.

They were her friends—those folk—all of them, regardless of station in life. She had been their confidante, their adviser, as well as a mere financial aid."

"But you—help, sir. You're always giving to something."

"Exactly!" (bitterly.) "To 'something.' That's about all I know concerning my beneficiaries. I give checks when somebody or other representing a society for something or other asks me to give. I don't understand exactly what it is for—nor, probably, do they. I give to get rid of them. Sometimes Graham knows. I'm glad we're rid of Graham for a while. Driving him away was the only thing the doctors have done for me. Graham receives the letters—or the verbal applications as the case may be. He decides. If he decides the charity is worthy, I sign the check. The only thing that would make my charity real would be to have writer's cramp. Bah! . . . No; Mother had to have her heart satisfied before she went into anything: Dad had to have his head satisfied—but me? If my secretary is satisfied, I'll sign my own death warrant."

"Don't you think that I might give you one of those powders that the doctor left in case your nerves got hupset again?"

"Soothing syrup for my nerves at eleven o'clock in the morning?" he scoffed. "No, thanks, Bland. I want to talk, and by Heaven, you've got to listen! One can't talk to his friends about himself and his notions. They want to talk about themselves and their notions. You will have to stand for it, Bland. Do you know how long it is since I have talked? Two years! Two years almost to a day. You remember the time, don't you, Bland? It was to Master Robert that I talked then. Poor old Bob —I delivered him quite an address on the error of his ways! If he had not given in to my advice, he would be alive to-day; happy, doubtless—happier than my plans could ever make him. . . . That's what hurts, Bland; what makes this—tragedy well nigh unendurable. To think that—it was an end to which my guiding brought him!"

Martin stopped suddenly and lay quiet, scarce breathing lest an odd filling of his throat cause the breath to sound a sob in the ears of his old servant. Bland himself gazed helplessly about the room as if to gather inspiration for cheer.

"Hit was a—honourable hend, sir!" he managed to comment, and the man-soul that grasped for solace found easement in the words.

True—it was an honourable end. They had

brought little tales of his last moments, of his quiet, efficient service in aiding women into the boats, after his tenderly nurtured girl wife, with hysteric frenzy had flung herself into the icy waters in an effort to reach a boat that was pulling away from the sinking liner. The elder brother pictured him there—the bright-faced, merry youngster whose weakness had turned to strength at last—standing on the slowly settling monster, defeated by its enemy in the first flush of its battle. They said that, with arm flung about the shoulders of a new-found friend from the crew, he stood there smiling and waving—and smoking the inevitable cigarette.

It was this picture of his last moments in human body that cut Charles Martin clean to the heart even while the patrician staunchness of it comforted him. He had never been able to break Bob of smoking cigarettes—and, deserted by the aristocratic girl whom his brother had chosen for him, Bob had sought and found a comrade heart in a member of the crew. Perhaps no one can know what another needs; perhaps even the most loving and well-intentioned hand in the world cannot guide another's destiny! Perhaps that other girl would not have . . . but such flagrantly absurd hypotheses arrived nowhere. One could never tell

what would have happened if—this or that had not!

The other girl was a child of the stage whose votaries—to the notion of Charles Martin—were either emotionally unfitted for realities of life, or were shrewdly calculating to turn them all to selfish account. His own estimate of the wife of his brother's mésalliance had differed from that of the Martin attorney, to be sure; the lawyer putting her in the former class while he was firmly fixed upon including her in the latter. Developments had indicated that the attorney had been right—but one never could tell. The suicide might have been "faked" just to gain the sensation for which such people have insatiable lust. Probably the girl's sister would have raised an infernal row if he had not had the forethought to send a generous check. The fact that it had been returned to him, in pieces so small that one could hardly distinguish its identity, was the only phase of the proceeding which had caused him to doubt for a moment that his theory and his consequent action were correct. Yet the sister was undoubtedly a termagant; he had a mental concept of her being referred to as "that Lee woman" in her little home town, wherever it might be. Beyond a peradventure, she was still

boasting of her defiant act. It was something to have flung the money of a Martin back into his face!

"Yes; this is the first time I have really talked about anything that mattered since that day." He took up the thread after a weary, thoughtful pause, adding bitterly: "and my theme seems to be the same: the uselessness of us. Useless we seemed bound to be, I told old Bob—but there was no particular necessity on that account of our being weak-minded, bereft of sound judgment, and mere tools of the unscrupulous. Thank you, Bland; I think that ends my oration for the day. You may go now. I'll shut up for two more years."

"But you talk to your friends, sir." There was, as has been intimated, a lack of imagination in Bland.

"Of course. One must use words in order not to forget them. However, I do not talk. I 'chat' —of polo, which I detest—what's the use of whacking a ball about?—and business, which I loathe still more."

"But one of the directors of the Consolidated, sir, that was here yesterday, sir, told me while 'e was waitin', sir, that you were most hefficient—hefficient was the word, sir."

"Undoubtedly the word was 'efficient,' Bland";

there was an infinite satire in the tone. "Nobody dares to use any other word just now. This world has gone efficiency mad. If any one were to ask me what I thought, I'd say: 'Damn efficiency,' Bland."

The man started in genuine consternation. "Oh, sir!"

"Somewhere or other there may be something that is genuine efficiency, but one seldom meets it. Usually it indicates simply taking advantage of the fact that the other fellow is not looking, to steal him blind. It's the ultimate result of the world trend now, Bland—this efficiency notion—the insistence upon getting out of a thing twice as much as one puts into it. It gets results; but I wonder sometimes if a turn in the road isn't ahead. It has not been the efficient people of the world whose work has lasted. It has been those who have been willing to squander their souls for a pittance, who have been willing to give—and give of their best—without questioning what their return was to be." His voice had grown softly meditative. He was speaking to his best friend, Charles Martin, and not to his servant, William Bland.

"I'm sure you're right, sir." It was vague; and Martin, awaking suddenly, sent him a friendly grin.

"That is, it would be if you knew what it was all about, eh?"

His eyes roamed idly and unseeingly from object to object until finally they rested upon a tiny canvas that hung upon his wall. He considered it with a new interest and then nodded at it as he spoke:

"There's an example of efficiency, Bland. I had the devil of a time wresting that thing away from the dealer. He had sold everything else of the artist's into the Searles collection. Made a pile of money by it, too, I'll wager. He bought the things undoubtedly from one who had no notion of their value—who did not know that Edmund Browne, after his death, of course had become the favourite of the hour in fickle artistic circles. Those five tiny canvases of Browne's will make him live down the ages undoubtedly along with the old fellows—and the dealer will have a corking tombstone and the epitaph: 'Here lies an efficient man'!

"I wish I'd been born poor, and an artist, Bland—for if I had been born poor, I should have been an artist. They told me so in Paris, and I believe they were right. As it is, I'm a dilettante and a patron of art. Just as I am of business, Bland—a dilettante and a patron. In fact, when you get right down to rock bottom, I'm a dilettante and a patron

of life; and I tell you right frankly I'm damned tired of being a dilettante and a patron."

Bland had never seen his young master in such a state of rebellion, and was frantically uneasy—a phrase which accurately describes his stolid inner self in helpless anxiety.

"Hi'm sure I don't know whatever 'as come over you, sir," he jerked out. "Hi feel I should send for the doctor, sir."

"Doctors be damned," remarked Martin serenely. "Everything be damned, Bland," he added with an even greater sweetness of tone. "Nobody and nothing is going to do me any good until I get some of these sea-thoughts out of my system. All I did coming over, Bland, was to sit on the deck and think. You know that. Somehow I wasn't just fit for bridge or anything when I'd left old Bob and that helpless, useless little thing he married—over there. . . . I couldn't help thinking—a few thoughts; and wondering what it was all—for."

"Shall I get you some more magazines, sir?"

"No more magazines, Bland. The 'damn everything' was a blanket injunction and included magazines. They're rot! It is an insult to a man's intelligence to pile those things about him and expect him to use what intellect he has on them! I

don't know what editors of these things are thinking of to pour a lot of these indecencies into the homes of our land—most of 'em running over with youngsters eager to fill their minds with anything new—and snatching whatever food comes to hand without question—until it's too late. Yet the men behind that stuff are the best fellows in the world. 'Member Mr. Carruthers, Bland—that classmate of mine who was here yesterday?"

"Hi remember 'im, sir—as pleasant spoke has Hi've seen."

"And a fellow with more ideas in a minute than most of us have in a year. Sized me up in fine fashion. Told me that all I needed was to get out and split wood." (He laughed at the recollection.) "Well"—rising on his elbow and pointing to the most distant of the periodicals—"he's the editor of that—the farthest one over, and the rottenest."

"Wot's the matter with 'im, sir?" interestedly. He knew Carruthers, you see, and Carruthers did not seem rotten.

"He's the victim of efficiency, Bland," with gentle satire. "He has got to make money for his publishers. That's his business. His publishers have the notion, moreover—Lord knows where they got it—that the good folk of the country want rotten-

ness; that nothing but rottenness pays. Our best authors, whose former work has shown that their birthright is good literature, have sold it for the usual mess of pottage which is giving everybody ptomaine poison of the brain. Lord! I'd like to read fairy tales for a change!"

"Fairy tyles, sir?"

"Ay-ay! Fairy tyles, Bland. The fairy-est tyles that can be had! They're truer to fact—when it comes to that—than this truck. Mother used to read them to me when I was so high"; he lifted his hand in measurement with a dreamy, far-away gaze. "Good old mater! 'How she spoiled her laddies,' they would say in these days—reading to us before the fire until we were drowsy and eager for bed! . . . There was Red Riding Hood . . . Bland, ever hear of her?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

"Well, she almost came to grief calling upon a wolf in his bedroom. *Risque* situation, wasn't it? But he was the hide-and-hair sort of wolf so that she got off all right. She was quite as innocently misled as are the heroines of our modern fictions: she fancied the old beast was her grandmother! Except for a queer expression about his eyes, she couldn't tell the difference until he grabbed her!"

Martin chuckled audibly and Bland was so relieved at the sound that he affected an absorbing interest in the foolery. "Reminds one awfully of the innocence of the maid in the latest serial of . . . but you don't read fiction, do you, Bland?"

"Hi 'ave little time, sir."

"True; but you ought to brush up on Red Riding Hood. I'm no good at re-telling a story. The tale ended very happily. In modern fictions she wouldn't have been quite so lucky. She would have been innocently daring and adventurous and alluringly high spirited and all of that right up to the bedroom scene. After that, the magazine would be soggy with the tears of the instalments that tried to prove her a bitterly wronged woman. Slush!"

"Slush, hindeed, sir! Hi 'ad no hidea that fairy tyles were that kind, sir. Wot books 'ave them hin, sir?"

The roar of laughter that came from Martin at this remark more than compensated Bland for a slightly ruffled dignity.

"Maybe those efficiency publishers are right about judging the public taste after all," he commented, quite enigmatically, adding: "You'd be keen for 'Bluebeard,' Bland. Ever hear of the old fellow?"

"It seems to me that Hi 'ave, sir; 'e was king 'Ennery, was 'e not, sir?"

"Well, my impression is that one of the two modelled himself on the other; but I'm not quite sure which one came first."

There was a twinkle in Martin's eye as if he was having a bully good time all by himself. Bland foresaw a hearty appetite for luncheon. This was better than philosophic mourning.

"Bluebeard was an old roué and rake, of course—the 'prominent clubman' of his day. Yet the author of the story does not regale us with a full set of plans, with specifications, of his amours. They had artistic restraint in those days of real literature. Besides, the old fellow had the decency to have his lady loves—tandem; and he had a notion of discipline, with all his laxity, that the second leading man in the present-day novel hath not. But, be that as it may, I remember that 'Cinderella' was the real story. I had to have that every night, no matter what others were told. And the mater always had to tell it the same way else I'd catch her up."

"Hi know 'Cinderella,'sir." It was with some pride that Bland made the point.

"Everybody knows 'Cinderella,' Bland. She has

been one of the six best sellers of every age because she's heroine of the sort of story that everybody hopes is true. An ash maiden married to a prince—happily and for ever afterward! An ash maiden, Bland, isn't that quaint? Not a sculptor's model who posed for him in the altogether, or a lady from the chorus, or a—er—Salamander, I believe they call the type—but an ash maiden who dreamed! Real fiction in those days, Bland!"

"Hi seem to forget, sir"—Bland had not taken the interest in fairy tales in his early youth that his young master had—"'ow it was that she 'appened to meet hany one so far habove her stytion?" (Fairy tales were a fortunate topic—they brought smiles—they must be held to conscientiously.)

"Ah—now you have put your finger on a vital point! It took a fairy godmother to arrange it. None of your female dragons, or ambitious chaperons, or eligibility hunting mamas"—his engagement to various of society's buds had been so often rumoured that there was a satirical bitterness in the tone—"but a fairy godmother! That's why our lives go all wrong, Bland"; and under the whimsy was a yearning that only a very lonely and rather temperamental young man of thirty can feel to its utter depths. "The mater used to call them guar-

dian angels, but whatever one calls them, one knows they are not of this day and age. The fairies that mater used to tell us about went out of fashion about the time that—well—her sort of religion became *passé*. . . . They were all of a piece, Bland, not of the earth, earthy. They were too sweet, too good to last. They weren't"—he made a little, contemptuous grimace—"efficient."

The telephone rang rather peremptorily for a telephone in the suite of a young millionaire—at least this notion was quite apparent in the stiffishness of Bland's back as he went to answer it. Martin had started nervously at the sound of the bell, which had, before that morning, been muffled carefully. It was possible that the hotel personnel did not comprehend to the full the favour being done them by Martin in taking his suite there. Bland would investigate before the day ended, one might be reasonably certain.

"If that's a man or a dog to see me, Bland, I'll be delighted to see him," Martin remarked a bit wistfully. For the first time in many weeks he had leisure to realize his loneliness. In the first stages of grief he had longed for solitude, but now . . . "If it's a woman, however, old or young, I'm out, dead, or abroad still—I don't care which you choose

to say. Ho-hum!" It was a weary sigh and he fiddled impatiently with the fringe of his rug.

Bland's voice, without, was audible only in rumble, and his face, when he appeared, was a study in perplexity.

"Your hinstructions doesn't just fit the case, sir," he hesitated. "It's a little girl, the clerk says, hand she's quite hobstinate about giving her nyme, sir. Says it don't matter, but the business is most himportant."

Martin considered.

"Clerk says she's dressed rawther shabby, sir. It might hindicate 'er herrand."

"O-oh! Tell clerk to say I can't see her, Bland. I can't stand a tale of woe. Tell him to ask her how much she wants."

"Very good, sir."

"Wait, Bland!" The pause was instantaneous. "No use having her tell all of her story to an unfeeling clerk. Besides, he has troubles of his own. Tell him to send her up and you'll investigate her plea."

"Yes, sir." It was not an assignment that Bland longed for.

"Find out if any of the charities has neglected her case."

With a bow, Bland withdrew majestically, leaving his young master, suddenly returned to his boyish mood, to continue to himself with grim humour: "I don't care to have all the money I give go into salaries of investigating committees! I want some of it to go into bread and butter and fuel and clothes. By Jove!" he grinned to himself, balancing the heel of one slippered foot upon the toe of the other with a detached absorption in the feat from sheer ennui, "they've got to be—efficient!"

As Bland returned after several minutes' absence there was observable, even to the negligent glance, a distinct change of demeanour. He met his young master's look of inquiry with an embarrassed cough.

"Well?" Martin was inclined to be a bit impatient.

"She is not a charity person, sir, and she hinsists on seeing you personally." Bland grinned fugitively, but recovered at once.

"What name did she give? Who is she? What does she want?"

"She wouldn't give no nyme, sir—that is—not hexackly, sir, nor styte 'er business, but" (mysteriously) "she's quite hintent, sir" (he coughed again) "hon seeing you. Hi think she's quite 'armless, sir."

Martin drew his straight brows together in a half-

puzzled, half-resentful frown. Bland had always been impeccable as a dragon, yet now he seemed quite as "hintent" as this young person without.

"Hi think she would—hamuse you, sir," he ventured to bridge the gap of silence.

Martin turned wearily from his kindly mentor. "All right, Bland," he said simply. "Bring her in. Is she an acrobat, or a street singer?"

Bland paused at the threshold and pressed his lips firmly into line with well-manicured, knotted fingers before he trusted himself to speak.

"N'ither, sir," he replied. "She says as 'ow she's your fairy gawdmother, sir!"

"For the love of heaven! What is this that you have cooked up for my amusement now, good old Bland? A charade?"

"Hon my Honour, sir. Hi never saw 'ide nor 'air of 'er before!" There was no mistaking his truthfulness. Martin had once laughingly said that Bland deserved no credit for his entire veracity on all occasions, for he had not the imagination to lie.

"But—what . . . ?"

"Hi know no more habout it than you do yourself, sir." Bland was earnest despite the twinkle in his eyes—a reminiscent gleam of a delightful experience. "She says to me that she was after the

Prince, sir, that in the newspypers they called 'Martin,' hand they said lived 'ere in the—it sounded like Palace, sir—but it might 'ave been honly the queer way she 'ave of pronouncin'."

"And she said that she was. . . ?"

"Your fairy gawdmother, sir."

Martin darted a quizzical look at the man.

"Is she"—tapping his forehead significantly—"all right, Bland?"

"Oh, quite, sir. More than that, sir. I should tyke her to be a most bright little miss, sir. She's well mannered, too."

"Bring her in, Bland," Martin chuckled eagerly. "This promises to be not such an uneventful morning after all! Into my dull, drab, worthless life—enter my fairy godmother!"

CHAPTER VIII

BLAND'S majestic air was not in the least marred by the twinkle in his eyes, nor the pomposity of his voice blurred by the something or other that had been causing a slight cough. His announcement was as impressive as any that he ever made in his life.

"The fairy gawdmother!"

Certainly Comfort noticed nothing strange about him, although she had thought his buttons were most unlike any that those of Mrs. Prouty's gentleman boarders had ever worn. She was quite too absorbed in an observant interest in her surroundings to take especial note of any one particular thing. The rugs were very soft and deep—quite like those one might expect to discover at the Palace if one knew anything at all about rugs. It had stopped raining and, as she noted the soft glow that filtered in through the windows, Comfort impressed upon herself the fact that the person with the queer buttons must be asked for her umbrella when the interview was over. It was Mrs. Prouty's

umbrella, and its loss would be remembered against her.

Upon the announcement, Martin drew himself up into a more conventional sitting posture on the couch. Comfort came forward quickly.

"Oh, please don't disturb yourself, Mr. Prince!" she exclaimed with anxiety in her tone. "You looked so comfortable all squiggled down; I'm sorry that you are not well."

"Thanks," replied Martin very gravely, his quick, appraising glance taking in every detail of the child's appearance, "I feel a vast amount better than I did fifteen minutes ago. Won't you sit here, near me?" He indicated a very high-backed straight chair upon which she could comfortably reach a rung with her worn little shoes.

Comfort seated herself with the easy grace of unconscious childhood, and clasped her hands in her lap. She did not know exactly how to begin. Martin saw her hesitation, and rightly divining its cause graciously made opening for the interview. Genuine shyness in a child pleased him.

"My man tells me that you are a fairy godmother?"

Comfort looked at him with swift interrogation. There had been boarders at Mrs. Prouty's of the

sort who fancied that this was a bit of a joke. This young man did not seem of their kind, however, and his voice was quite as interested and grave as the Gnome's was wont to be when querying her upon fairy matters.

"Yes," she replied frankly, with a direct glance that put to rout his last suspicion of her insincerity, "that is what I truly am; but of course my business is peeling potatoes and things and wawshing dishes. I wait on tables, too, mostly—when I am not making beds."

"I—see," Martin accepted with a swift dart of his eyes toward Bland who had silently obeyed his master's gesture and remained. "Fairy godmothering is then a sort of avocation with you, I am to understand? Have you a name that is used when you wait on the table and peel potatoes?"

"Oh, yes," Comfort's assent was ready enough, "my sponsors-in-baptism name is 'Comfort Browne' —but everybody except Stepmother calls me 'Fairy-godmother.' Mr. Gnome started it."

"Mr. Gnome?" considering. "He sounds interesting. Where does he—er—burrow, if one may ask?"

"Oh, at the boarding-house on Sixty—— Street where we all live. There's the stepsister and the giant, besides, and—but I must not tell you yet!"

"It must be a most interesting household, Fairy-godmother; I had no notion that I was so near Fairy-land! Why, it's really only a stone's throw away, isn't it?"

"If you are a good thrower." Comfort looked at her muddy little shoes and sighed. Yet she had money to ride back—that helped. Martin flashed a look at her before his smile lighted up his eyes. She was very serious. It was not the quick, pointed reply of the weasel-eyed street *gamine.*

"Do you know," he went on, "it's odd that my man and I were speaking of you only a minute or so before you came in. That is, we were speaking of Cinderella's fairy godmother and I suppose you are she—or related to her? As I remember"—with great gravity the interrogation was put—"the god-mothers were sisters, were they not?"

"Oh, no," Comfort replied simply. "She was a real fairy godmother, made of fairy stuff that could change into things. I'm just a nordinary skin-and-bones one—a play one. I can't do anything," she sighed. "But I do the best I can." Suddenly she clasped her hands about her knees and hunched herself up more comfortably in the high-backed chair. "Didn't you just love Cinderella?"

"My dear Fairy-godmother, I was just crazy

about Cinderella! As I was saying to Bland just before you came in. . . . What was I saying, Bland? Well, it doesn't matter—but it was something about my enthusiasm over Cinderella, and the quaintness of an ash maiden's marrying a prince."

Comfort fixed her quiet, penetrating gaze upon him with such steadiness that Martin mentally went over his last sentence to see if there could have been anything to give offence. Even his flippancy had a certain sincerity in it, so he absolved himself freely.

"Well?" he said. "Well, Fairy-godmother?"

"Are you a real prince?"—the query was put slowly and with a penetrating though dreamy gaze—"or just a play one—like I am Fairy-godmother?"

"Well, really, my dear little girl, I don't know that I had ever considered the matter with the serious attention that it seems to deserve. To my knowledge there is no blot on my royal 'scutcheon—nothing that might disgrace one of the blood. However, whether my title is clear or not—is rather a matter for you to decide. Am I cast in the rôle of prince?"

"I don't know what that means," her level eyebrows drew together thoughtfully. "Roll is a biscuit, isn't it?"

"It is, Fairy-godmother," he replied with a grin, "and it is a very foolish person who tries to make it mean anything else. What I really wish to know is: how did you get the notion that I was a prince?"

"Oh, Stepmother said that you were! Cook we used to have was a sister of Lizzie who scrubbed for you. You remember Lizzie—don't you?"

"I'm sure that my mother would have remembered—Lizzie," he said softly, "unless she came too late—for Mother. You see—I lost out a bit on the names of the—er—Lizzies and others."

"But Lizzie had yellow hair—and a baby! The cutest baby!" Comfort was enthusiastic indeed. "You would have remembered Lizzie if you'd seen the baby!"

"I'm sure I should," politely. "But—about this prince matter: I am to understand that Lizzie with the yellow hair and the baby told cook who used to work for Stepmother, whom she in turn told, that I was a prince. Is that it?"

Comfort nodded delightedly. "Edzackly!" It was Cricket's word. "And Mr. Gnome said that you certainly had enough to keep a kingdom going quite respectably, and then I asked the True Princess. . . ." She clapped her hand over her

mouth. "Oh, I hadn't meant to tell you about her—yet! I was keeping her for a s'prise!"

"But indeed," he protested, gravely courteous, "nothing could surprise me more, even with this undramatic announcement. I had no notion that you knew the True Princess! What—if one may ask it—was her verdict?"

Comfort hesitated. Memory of the answer to that question of hers was all too sharp in her mind.

"She said that you certainly acted like one of the blood. That you would prob'ly have cut off heads for fun if you had lived in your middle age." Martin smiled at the thought hid in her innocently quaint phrasing. "I don't think she cares for princes much," she added with a little sigh.

"Quite evidently not," Martin granted. "However, I can't blame her in the least for they are usually weaklings or tyrants or both. I much prefer Jack the Giant Killer. Since she is one of 'the blood' herself, it seems somewhat strange that she should be so bitter, however. She should know the trials of keeping up royal appearances, and be more sympathetic." His tone was so dolorous that Fairy-godmother quite lost the twinkle in his eyes.

"Well," she admitted slowly—or, rather, offered as a working explanation for her True Princess's

vagaries—"I have a hunch that one of 'em done her dirt once."

Martin quite suddenly threw back his aristocratic young head and roared with plebeian laughter—such utter boyishness of abandon to mirth that Bland, who had disappeared for the nonce into the bedchamber, bobbed back to the threshold with a grin.

"Where in the world, child," he demanded, "did you ever hear such an expression as that?"

Comfort gazed at him in innocent surprise, a vague but sympathetic smile upon her lips.

"Why, that's what Stepsister says when they dock her wages at the store!"

Martin became instantly calm. "A-h-h! So Stepsister is in a store, is she?"

"Yes," with an air of imparting important information. "Blithedale's in the ribbons. There's another lady at the house that's in the store, too, but she's only in the basement hardware. It's sweller being in the ribbons. The Giant is the swellest, though. He's some dresser, too! He's the floor-walker, 'long the ribbon aisle."

"I—see! The Giant is the swellest but Stepsister is reasonably swell. Is that it?"

Comfort considered a bit. "Well," she yielded carefully, "she is—and she isn't." Unconsciously

she adopted the tone of Blithedale's: "She wears swell clothes—good-looking little models and very *chick*—but"—confidentially—"she isn't in it with the True Princess."

Martin dropped easily into the same tone and drew nearer.

"Then I am to understand that the True Princess is—not so '*chick*,' perchance, but a real nabob-ess? How did you learn that she was—one of us?"

"Well, I found it out for sure only yesterday. Of course, you can—I mean 'one can,' the True Princess taught me to say 'one'—always *feel* true princes and princesses, but I didn't want to make a mistake. So I tried it with the roseleaf . . . that's sure."

"The roseleaf, then, is the acid test?"

"Oh, no," puzzled. "It's just a way to find out . . . like the roseleaf in the story of the True Princess. Of course you know it?" politely.

"My education in fairy tales has, I find, been sadly neglected after all, Bland. Make a note, please, to get me the 'True Princess' story. Can you give me an outline of it so that I will not feel so utterly at a disadvantage in this discussion?" he queried her. "Where did you learn it?"

"My Mama used to tell it to me over and over,"

she said very quietly, twisting her hands together in her lap. "It was my pettest one of all she used to tell me!"

"It's queer, Fairy-godmother, but my mama used to tell me fairy stories, too. Does your mama still tell them to you?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Prince," Comfort told him gently, "my Mama is dead. She died when I was only four." She swallowed hard and patted her foot on the rung of the chair to keep herself in control, but the little red lips quivered despite her efforts. Martin reached out his firm, sensitive hand and laid it over her twisting fingers.

"I know, dear little Godmother," he said tenderly, "my mama who used to tell me fairy stories is dead, too. She went away from me a long, long time ago, but I have not forgotten her fairy stories. We never forget those, do we? Come—tell me the story of the True Princess and the roseleaf," he added brightly, as she felt her pockets for a handkerchief that did not appear.

Into the squared patch effects upon her shabby little coat, and down into the depths of the irregularly gathered skirt she delved, but her hand was quite empty when it was withdrawn. As if he were in the habit of doing such things every day of his

life, Charles Martin brought forth his own handkerchief and slipped it unceremoniously into her hand.

"Oh, thank you ever so much," said Comfort gratefully as she wiped her eyes and daintily patted her nose. "I must have forgot mine, I came away in such a hurry! I really have two: the prettiest one the True Princess gave me at Christmas, and the other one has a purple border. It was Stepsister's and she didn't like it. I don't, either—much . . . but one needs a change of handkerchiefs."

"One does indeed," he agreed heartily. "Make a note of that, too, Bland—and then you may go. 'One needs a change of handkerchiefs,'" he dictated to the man, "'and one does not like purple.' Now for the story."

Simply, and with scarce a variation from her wording of it as she had related it to Miss Woods and Cricket, she told it to Charles Martin, lying among his comfortable cushions, luxurious as those of an oriental potentate.

"And you see," she completed with satisfaction, "she was the only one who just couldn't sleep—though of course she hadn't any idea why—and then I knew."

"Of course you did," he commented briefly. His

eyes were very soft as they rested upon the flushed little face. "It was clever of you, Fairy-godmother, to put it to the test. It seems to be quite conclusive. Is the True Princess in the ribbons, too?"

"Oh, dear no! She could of been, though," she hastened to add, jealous of every shred of her princess's honour, "but she wouldn't take the place because the old man wanted her to go out to dinner with him. She might of had ice cream, too," meditatively.

"What does she do—anything?"

"Yes—she writes stories."

"That does afford dinners occasionally, I believe, if one sells promptly and well."

"Oh, True Princess doesn't *sell* her stories—she just writes them! She sends them to friends of hers who send them back just as soon as they can."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes—with nice shiny cards in them that thank her ever so politely. They like them very much—the stories I mean—but you see, they have so many on hand."

"I—understand. So her manuscripts come back, do they?"

"Yes—that's what she calls them, too, 'manyscripps.' Have you a great many on hand?"

"I? Oh, no! I haven't any."

Comfort drew a relieved sigh. "That's what I hoped," she remarked softly as if to herself, but Martin heard her.

"Why did you hope that, Fairy-godmother?" he inquired with a smile.

"So that you wouldn't be like the others. Of course if you haven't many on hand you will want them."

"Well, really, I hadn't fancied. . . ."

Comfort clapped her hands. "I know; I hadn't, myself, till of a sudden it came. Wasn't it lucky?"

"Very," in an inscrutable tone as he looked into her candid eyes and watched the delighted smile dimple her cheeks. Then he spoke very slowly indeed, gazing at her with such intentness that not a tremor could have escaped his notice:

"Did your True Princess tell you to come to me?"

"Oh, dear no!" Her tone was genuinely aghast and she added with faint apprehension: "I hope you aren't going to tell her because it would spoil everything. Nobody knows but me—and you."

"I believe you," said Martin, the astute, very quietly. "Now—tell me all about it."

"Well, you see, some fat packages came this morning instead of skinny ones and Princess hasn't

any money to pay Stepmother. The skinny ones would of had it," with a little sigh, "and I wouldn't of needed to have come. It was a long walk," she admitted frankly. "Do you mind if I squiggle my foot in my shoe? There's a blister, and it hurts."

"Squiggle all you want to," Martin said heartily, and, as a slender little hand aided in the squiggling, he caught sight of a very large hole which was entirely covered inside with pinky childish flesh. No wonder, he thought, there were blisters!

"I think I'd wear my Sunday-school shoes if I were you when I had much walking," he suggested carefully.

"Oh, I haven't any Sunday-school shoes!" she hastened to assure him of the fact he wished to know. "You see, I don't need them. I don't go to Sunday-school—that's when I do my heaviest peeling. These are very comfortable shoes—when I squiggle my toes a little."

"We'll see that you don't walk back. Bland, order the . . . No, that won't do, either," he interrupted himself quickly. "Cause too much explaining and this visit is a secret, I believe?"

"Oh, very," hastily. "Nobody a-tall must know."

"Then we'll have Bland put you on the ——"

"Thank you. I know edzackly how to do it. I'd planned to ride back because I'll have to get there in a hurry and I have plenty to pay with. You see this morning when Princess cried at the fat envelopes I wanted to give her my thirty-seven cents that Mr. Gnome gave me—all but one car fare and a bag of salt."

"Salt?" puzzled.

"Yes—the salt I don't earn," she explained. "Stepmother's salt."

He understood at once and a shadow came into his eyes.

"You poor little mite!" he said under his breath. "Wouldn't your Princess take it?" Her uncalculating frankness in matters quite ungermane was giving him a grasp of the situation firmer than he realized—until long after.

"No—it just made her cry worse than ever—and she went out in a nawful hurry so Stepmother wouldn't see her crying or scold her about not paying."

"She owes Stepmother, does she?"

"Oh, yes—for the skylight room, and Stepmother says she'll have to give it up to some one that pays reg'lar. Nobody will take it, though; it's the squintiest room in the house and lets in rain.

Princess says she likes it because she can see stars at night. 'They help,' she told me, 'most wonnerfully!'"

The unconscious imitation of the wistfulness in the word went through to his heart. That such brave need there should be while he had everything! It had never come to the realization of Charles Martin that the realest needs of poverty are not to be discovered by organized charities. Of course there were slums—and people who lived in hovels and tenements that were impossible—evil-smelling neighbourhoods and all that; but this—why this was, as he had said, within a stone's throw of his own sort of life!—"If one were a good thrower"; he remembered the phrase and smiled sorrowfully.

Then he forced his mind from contemplation of the ocean of the abstract into the very narrow channel of the concrete present problem.

"So she cried when the thick packages came back, did she? Perhaps she was not intended for a writer, Fairy-godmother. Has she tried to secure some other sort of work?"

"Oh, yes, lots and lots of things! She goes most every morning to look up ad-ver-si-ments, but she can't find anything—'cept now and then something to do on her typewriter." She sighed and

added with a quaint counterfeit of some one's tone: "Work is very scarce this season."

Martin struggled to suppress a smile. "So I am told," he agreed gravely, and there was a thoughtful pause. He felt uncomfortably sure that he was not living up to his rôle.

"I will keep it in mind and perhaps—let me see: your Princess is Miss . . . ?"

"Woods," supplied Comfort eagerly. Her attitude of expectancy reproached him.

"Is there anything—what would you have me do?" he asked finally. "Since I am a prince, and she is a princess, my duty is clear, but just how am I to fulfil my obligation to royalty?" With the words, his mother's almost-forgotten and oft-repeated phrase: "*Noblesse oblige*" flashed into his mind, and the mocking tone suddenly grew tender.

"I can't just give her money, you know. That is not royal etiquette, and it might bring her into worse difficulties."

Comfort gazed at him in genuine surprise. It was quite evident to this man into whose ken had come varying types of begging craft that the child was in no sense one of their ilk.

"Why, I thought you could buy her stories, of

course! They are perfectly good, and everybody else seems to have too many on hand to take them. You said that you hadn't any." It was certainly an excellent selling point.

"It sounds simple, doesn't it?" he mused. "But, you see, Fairy-godmother, I'm not in the story-buying business. It might look suspicious to your True Princess. No; frankly that will not quite do. We must think of some other plan."

A shadow of disappointment fell upon the clear, wide eyes. Yet she was plainly hopeful of the result of his cogitation. She wisely left him to his musing, and her interested gaze travelled slowly about the room. Suddenly she gave a little cry.

"Where did you get my daddy's picture?"

Martin jumped. "Your daddy's—where?" Comfort's pink little finger, still a bit loose skinned with dish-water immersion, pointed unerringly to the cherished Browne canvas.

"That's my daddy's," she said delightedly. "I know because we had it ever so long till my Mama had to sell it to the man to pay Mrs. Prouty. He said he wouldn't buy any more dinner cards if she didn't." Strange the assorted facts that cling to a childish memory, yet each has to do with a revelation to the child mind. It was the first time that Com-

fort remembered her soft-eyed little mother to have given way to uncontrollable tears.

"Come here," Martin spoke so gently that there was almost reverence in his tone. He gestured a place beside him, and took the slim little hand in his as she sat on the edge of the couch looking at him gravely. "You said that your name was——?"

"My sponsors-in-baptism name is Comfort Browne, but I like Fairy-godmother better."

"What do you remember about your daddy?"

"Not much," frankly. "'Cept what my Mama told me. You see I was only two when he died. I think I 'member the horsie foot he used to ride me—but maybe it's just that my Mama told me. My Mama cried when she had to give that picture to the man. That was just before she died and I was four then—most five. There were other ones, too, but my Mama liked that best. She and my daddy sat by that river she told me."

"And she got enough out of it to pay her board for a while?"

"Oh, yes! And Mrs. Prouty gave him the rest of the pictures she said, to pay fun'ral expenses. She tells it to me whenever I don't earn my salt."

"The artistic world certainly owes your daddy's baby girl a better life than that of a boarding-house

slavey," he muttered under his breath. "We'll see that it pays part of its debt."

"He was a very kind man," Comfort was saying seriously.

"Very," he acquiesced grimly, for he knew that her mind had reverted to the purchaser of the pictures, not their creator. "Such a very kind man that, being one of his best patrons, we are going to make it a point to tell him all about his kindness."

"That will be nice," breathed Comfort.

"I shall thoroughly enjoy it," he rejoined inscrutably.

"But of course"—Fairy-godmother resumed her chosen task very delicately—"he doesn't buy stories."

Martin came out of his diabolical planning of the peroration to the address at "B. Stern's, Dealer in Art; Old and Modern Masters."

"Eh? . . . Oh—of course not! Let me see; we were planning . . ." his eye fell upon the scattered magazines—without seeing them, stupid in receiving the notion they suggested. At last, however, it penetrated in a flashing of his consciousness. "I have it!" he exclaimed, clapping his hand down upon the bell for Bland with such suddenness that Comfort quite jumped. "Carruthers!" The sociable air plainly called for response.

"The very thing!" Fairy-godmother was enthusiastic if vague.

"Get Mr. Carruthers on the 'phone, Bland, and plug in the extension. I'll talk to him myself."

"Very good, sir."

"You see this Mr. Carruthers is an editor who buys stories," Martin explained to the eager-faced child. "Undoubtedly your princess friend has already sent him one or two. Every new writer does. If she has, it is perfectly simple."

"Oh, my, yes!" Fairy-godmother agreed delightedly.

"Mr. Carruthers is there, sir." Bland handed him the telephone. It was not just the bulky sort that they had at the boarding-house and Comfort took great interest in its manipulation. She rather feared from its inadequacy that it was not going to work. She drew a relieved sigh and settled back when her prince seemed to be getting results from it.

CHAPTER IX

CARRUTHERS?" he was saying into it comfortably. "Yes; Charley Martin. Jack, I want you to do something for me. I'll tell you the whole story when I see you—it's rich enough for a lead novelette—but this is the point now: Has a young woman by the name of Woods ever sent you a story? Eh?"

He turned to Comfort inquiringly. "Mr. Carruthers wishes to know if your princess's given name is Katherine."

"Oh, yes; that's her sponsers-in-baptism name." Comfort was much excited. It was wonderful that anybody at the other end of a funny little thing like that should know her True Princess's name right away!

"That is, I learn," repeated Martin carefully, "her sponsors-in-baptism name. Pardon? Oh, well" (chuckling) "her given name then, you old heathen, 'Katherine Woods'—Princess Katherine, if you wish her official title, about which more anon. . . . Why 'O Lord'? Oh—she has,

has she? Weren't any of them publishable? . . . Why didn't you, if you like her style? . . . Oh, well, you're going to keep the next one—or, better yet—you're going to send to her to submit the last one again. . . . Oh, yes, you are, Jackie; and you're going to send her a check for—how much do you usually pay beginners that are all style and no stock? A hundred? Is that all? This girl has an appetite, you know. Better take a couple of 'em, then, and I'll send you a check for the amount. What she needs is the money—right now. Have her send you one at once. . . . Oh, I don't know whether she's pretty or not. . . . Wait a minute and I'll try to find out for you." He turned to Comfort with his gravest air:

"Mr. Carruthers wishes to know if your True Princess is pretty."

"Oh, my, yes!" Fairy-godmother informed him eagerly. "She is puffickly bewtiful."

"Oh, my, yes," repeated Martin into the 'phone, very gravely, "puffickly bewtiful, I am told—but it's only fair to you as the editor of the most distinctive magazine to tell you that earlier in my conversation I learned that she wasn't exactly '*chick*.' Chickness—*chick-ness*, I say, can be acquired, however, when unfeeling editors cease to send back bulky

packages and send skinny ones instead. *Skinny* ones—Jack—Jove, man, brush up your vocabulary! . . . Well, I am in earnest so far as your sending that check is concerned. There is no joke about that. Write for that last story of hers before you go to lunch—and if you can give her any notions on how to improve it—do it. . . . Good Heavens, no, man—nothing like that! I never laid eyes on the girl. Can't tell you now—environment too crowded. Lunch with me here to-morrow, old man, will you? Any time you say. Right. Car will be waiting for you at ten minutes after. Till to-morrow, then, Jackie."

As Bland relieved him of the prosaic medium of the fairy machinations, he turned to Comfort with a cheerfully patronizing air. Instinctively she felt that he had dropped out of fairy atmosphere.

"Now, little Fairy-godmother," he said, smiling, "you may run back to your boarding-house where the True Princess and the Gnome and the Giant and the Stepmother live—who needs salt—and be happy in your mind. Mr. Carruthers is going to buy enough stories from your princess so that she can have dinners for a while, and he will help us to find out whether she can write stories better than she can—do other things. It will give us time to look about.

If you will leave the address of the fairy boarding-house there with my man before you go, I will see that the fairies in my kingdom visit there occasionally."

Comfort, realizing that the interview was in his mind considered quite terminated, rose politely. Her eyes, however, had not the sparkle in them that he had unconsciously anticipated. He fancied that she had not understood the real import of his message.

"We'll have your True Princess so that she will never cry again," he said cheerily. Bland stood at the door expectantly.

"Thank you," said Fairy-godmother in a very small, tired voice. "It doesn't seem much like a fairy story, does it?" she added, raising shadowed eyes to his bravely. "I—I hoped that you would come in disguise—and not—just—send the money."

Martin looked at her gravely, searchingly, and a dull red mounted into his cheek bones. The child had laid an unwitting finger upon the sadly callous place in his charity, and he realized it to the full.

"By Jove," he said half to himself, "that is exactly what I am doing—again. I sign the check and give it to Carruthers. Neither the mater nor dad would have done it so. You are right, Fairy-

godmother," he said humbly. "What shall I do?"

"They usually res-ker them," she replied with a beautiful vagueness. "I'll tell you how to get to where we live."

"Of course I could set the house on fire, but that has been done so much," complained Martin, again in the spirit of the thing.

"Couldn't you come in disguise?"

The child was really in earnest, he reflected amusedly. Then a newly awakened imp of adventure seized hold upon him. "Why not?" he considered. How could he hope to do any of the things he planned if he knew only the one sort of life? Somebody or other had said something once that he had liked about the more points of contact one had with his human fellows. . . .

"We're leaving here at the end of the week as we planned at first, Bland," he said in sudden decision.

"I'm glad that you've reconsidered, sir." Bland was distinctly relieved. "The doctor insisted on Martindyle at once without the stay over, you know, sir."

"Oh, we are—that is, I am not going to Martindale, Bland. I'm shipping you there a fortnight ahead. I'm remaining in New York."

Bland mistrusted his ears

"'Ere—without me, sir?"

"In town, Bland—but not in this suite of the—er—Palace. I'm going in disguise of a very humble citizen to take up my abode in a boarding-house on Sixty . . ."

Comfort clapped her hands and jumped up and down as Bland gasped with pallid countenance.

"You're jowking, sir," the man said wanly.

Martin shook his head.

"You'll not go without me, sir." The man was obdurate—his voice contained no interrogative inflection.

"You go to—Martindale, Bland," Martin exclaimed, exasperated. "I'll be there only a fortnight or so. I will have something to think about—something to make me forget how useless I am."

"But the doctor said that hall you needed was chyange of scene, sir, and air."

"The doctor is quite right, Bland, I shall have more of a change of scene and—air in a Sixty-somethingth Street boarding-house than I should have at Martindale." The young millionaire grinned.

"Then I shall go, too, sir."

"Hang it, Bland, you would be far more out of place in a boarding-house than I should."

"You could never stand it, sir. . . . The way they live, and the food, sir; and I feel sure that the service is very bad, sir."

Comfort looked anxiously from one to the other. Although she could not but feel that all would come out right now that matters had progressed thus far, the last remark alarmed her as well as hurt her a little.

"Oh, no," she said politely. "I am the service."

Martin smiled at her and she drew nearer and wriggled a soft little hand into his.

"I feel sure that the service will be most satisfactory, Bland—and in any event, I could stand things much better than you could. You forget that I have my fishing trips up in New Brunswick almost every year. You haven't any notion of how I live then, have you? Mine are not the 'de-luxe' trips that some of your men's gentlemen take. If we have a good cook in our guide—and it's usually Jim—we have, for breakfast, bacon and potatoes and soggy pancakes. For luncheon we have fish, if we are lucky, and potatoes and dried fruit sauce perhaps with biscuits that we can toss about the fire without too great danger of hurting anybody. As for dinner—which Jim insists is supper—if we want to be very festive, we have fish with bacon and

desiccated eggs, and the same biscuit toasted or cold."

"Oh, sir," exclaimed Bland, horrified to the core of his being, "Hi 'ad no hidea, sir——"

"Of course you hadn't, Bland," Martin agreed cheerfully, "else you would never have had this notion about my not liking this change of scene and —air. Those trips are the only times when I really live as a prince," he explained to Comfort, "and the only times that I feel like one! Oh, I shall dote on the boarding-house hash, Bland, but heaven knows what you will do!"

"Perhaps we could get him a place in the store," Fairy-godmother offered thoughtfully. She knew only such meaning of phrases as were furnished by her environment.

Martin met the kindly suggestion with a roar of laughter of such sociable sort that Comfort smiled in sympathy, although she did not in the least know what it was all about.

"That is an excellent notion!" he exclaimed. "I have the jolliest sort of a place for you in mind, Bland—'in the store'!"

"In tride, sir?" Bland was miserably conscious of being the butt of some sort of a joke. "Hour fambly 'as never bean in tride, sir!"

"All the more reason, Bland. You have only one fault: you are not democratic. One must broaden one's horizon, Bland." Martin was very serious but his eyes twinkled wickedly. "I am going to try to secure you a place in the—er—sprigged muslins. They have sprigged muslins, don't they?" he inquired of Comfort. She nodded gravely.

"I am not edzackly sure—but I can find out."

"Thank you. Your giant floor-walker may know—but we'll see to that when we come." He looked Bland over with a calculating eye. "Yes," he assured himself aloud, "I think that you would do excellently well in the sprigged muslins."

Bland groaned—and the sound escaped him—but in an instant he was the well-bred servant.

"Very good, sir," he said. "W'en do we go, sir?"

"We-ell," mused Martin thoughtfully, gazing at Comfort, "I think that Bland might call Saturday and engage rooms. Now, remember that if I am to come in disguise, you must pretend that you do not know me when I appear."

Comfort hopped delightedly from one foot to the other.

"O-oh! Isn't this the very mostest fun?" she gurgled. "But please, Mr. Prince, come this after-

noon, for the big, second story front is vacant—and the little room just back of it."

"What's the matter with the big, second story front, Fairy-godmother?"

"Oh, nothing!" she replied hastily. "It is a most dee-sirable chamber and can be used as both living room and bedroom with hot and cold water. It is so expensive that nobody can afford to take it and Stepmother is going to put another bed in it so that it will take four—if it is not rented by Friday." She sighed. "That will be another bed to make, and four in a room *are* mussy—you can't get away from that! Mr. Bland could have the little room if you wanted to sleep alone."

"Eh? Oh—yes, I am rather restless as a sleeper. Perhaps the two rooms would be best. Bland will come this afternoon and engage them."

"Of course"—Comfort was wonderfully delicate—"there are smaller rooms on the third floor if you haven't—a job. I thought, maybe, that you lost it—when you got sick. Most always they do."

Martin looked at her pitiful eyes and felt a something hot in his throat.

"You are a darling," he said. "You have all the deep beauty of your daddy's pictures." She smiled

vaguely because she knew from his eyes that Love spoke to her.

"And Stepmother always asts that first of all," practically.

"By Jove, of course! I hadn't thought of that." Martin smiled at her whimsically. "Do you know, Fairy-godmother, that I don't know a soul who would give me a job?"

Bland coughed nervously and moved with unwonted rapidity to the telephone as it rang.

"Shall my name go in disguise, too, Fairy-godmother?" Martin asked her.

"Oh, please be 'Mr. Prince,' for that's truly-rooly what you are; so it's not a story," Comfort pleaded.

"Very well, Mr. Charles E. Prince," he smiled at her.

"Mr. Carruthers again on the 'phone, sir."

"Ask his office to keep connection and I'll talk to him in about three minutes, Bland."

"Now, remember, Fairy-godmother-with-the-wonderful-daddy-whom-I-should-like-to-have-known, not a word about this fairy expedition to anybody. Keep your own counsel; and remember that you do not know me. If the True Princess gets an inkling of the truth, it will spoil all our plans. I am simply

'Mr. Prince' and this is—what is your sponsers-in-baptism name, Bland?"

"William, sir."

"And this is Mr. William Bland, his—er—friend. No matter what anybody asks you—that is all you know. It will break the charm—and you know what disasters come in fairy world when that is done."

"Oh, my, yes!" exclaimed Comfort gleefully, dancing off. "I shall not even *wink* when Mr. Bland comes for the rooms, and I'll get you a slather of clean towels."

"Sounds alluring, Fairy-godmother. I shall see you very soon again."

"Fine!" she exclaimed, "and I'll be ever and ever so careful about shushing. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye for the present," he returned, laughing in such genuine fashion that Carruthers heard pianissimo chuckles as they got together on the 'phone.

"What's the postscript, Jackie boy?" he asked in fine good humour. "Oh—she won't think of publication if she has the money. You often let things go for a year or two anyway, don't you? She will have forgotten before that. Not that it would hurt your old magazine if you did publish them, Mr. Carruthers—no matter what kind of rot it is. I

have just run through your last number and when you come here to-morrow I am going to tell you what I really think about that periodical you are getting out. The fact that your staff refused Miss Woods's stories is an argument in their favour to my mind."

He laughed at Carruthers's retort. "No—I'm not a fussy invalid—but it's a waste of good material to keep you editing stuff like that. The article which you had on 'The Nude in Art' last month was —adjectives fail me. When you go in for serious things you are a joke—and your fiction has been execrable." He chuckled again. "No—nothing more that I care to say now. I'll tell you the rest about yourself to-morrow. . . . There, there, Jackie—I didn't expect you to take it to heart! Of course it's hard, with your assistant gone. He had no business to go to the hospital—so he didn't. I apologize, old man, I apologize," he sang cheerily. "And one of your best readers, too—old standby, eh? Regular McGuffey, so to speak? Well—well, that is hard luck! No wonder. . . . *What—me?* I? I'm forgetting my grammar in my excitement! . . . Oh, I couldn't, couldn't I? Well, I don't know about that, Mr. John Carruthers! As I chance to be mightily in need of a 'job' right now, I'll just take you up on that proposi-

tion. No, I am not joking. I shall be down there on Monday morning. What time does a reader who also acts in the capacity of assistant editor, when he can assist, arrive at his desk? . . . *Wow!* Isn't that rather early for business? . . . Oh, very well, I can make it easily. . . . 'Why?' That's part of the story I'm going to tell you tomorrow. . . . No, I'm not ill in body, Jack, it will be good for me. As you said yesterday, you know—splitting wood is what I need. I'll show you how to run a magazine, sir!"

Bland's concern had deepened into misery as he disposed of the telephone and inwardly cursed the thing for its impertinent interference with the order of their lives.

"I've found a new use for myself, Bland," Martin told him delightedly. "I'm going to be a reader—er—assistant editor or something like that—under Mr. Carruthers."

"Oh, sir," groaned the poor fellow, "you've done for yourself, sir! And you just going to Martindyle, doctor's orders!"

"Damn doctors' orders, Bland," remarked Martin sweetly. "This will do me more good than a thousand doctors. I feel like a school boy before the vacation begins. Think of it—a prince in disguise

of a humble reader on a magazine to take up his abode in a boarding-house! the second floor front—the chamber of snobs! where I may sleep alone with hot and cold water!"

It was good to see him so gleeful but Bland feared the worst. Surely his young master could not have considered all of the phases of this mad prank!

"Wot will your friends think of this w'en they see you, sir?"

Martin spoke to him patiently: "Have you not lived in New York long enough, Bland, to realize that we are far less likely to meet any of our friends if we are staying in a middle-class boarding-house than if we were in Hong Kong or Cairo? Carruthers will know, of course. We're letting him in on the scheme; but to the rest I am simply out of town—Martindale if you choose. They will not care, and I'm sure I don't."

"But—going back and forth in the car, sir? They'll see you, sir—very like." Bland wished to be patient, too.

"Oh, we're not taking any of the cars, Bland. We are riding on the subway!"

Bland's gasp strangled itself in a cough and he leaned weakly against the jamb of the door.

CHAPTER X

IT MUST be admitted to those avid analysts who insist upon a futile conjecturing of what might have been had what was been quite different, that it is highly probable the Prince would not have been so instantly impressed with Cinderella had she, at his first sight of her, been moping in the ashes. Even a romanticist must conform to the spirit of actuality at least—must present his case as plausible or it will be routed, foot and horse, by the wrathful reader aroused to a sense of his deception. Having given one fact in hypothesis—the masculinity of the Prince—not even a blithe teller of fairy tales would dare to make his heroine unattractive at first sight. One will readily recall that in the Cinderella tale the fairy godmother had clothed her ash maiden in festal garments so gorgeous that her stepsisters did not recognize her at first—and turned green with envy at second.

So it turned out that, through the instrumentality of the fairy godmother of the boarding-house, Mr. Charles E. Prince was destined to meet Miss Katherine

Woods on the evening of the eventful day when the ashes of her woe had flamed into hope and the rags of melancholia had dropped from her, leaving her winsome personality clothed in a dazzling radiance —the metamorphosis of happiness than which there is none more wonderful. She had that day received a check for two hundred whole dollars from the most popular magazine on the market with a request for more stories! It was more than she had ever received as a year's income—from stories alone, and to have it come to her, lump sum, at the end of a period of desperation to which she looked back as does a healthy person to some vagary of his delirium, magnified its importance to an unbelievable degree.

With divine feminine intuition, the mortal Fairy-godmother was no less awake to sartorial effects in the matter of first impressions than was her fairy prototype, and the first dinner at which the True Princess was to meet the Prince was preceded by a manœuvre that would have done credit to the tall-hatted old person who furnished glass slippers.

At the imminent peril of burning various violently savoury vegetables, Comfort left the kitchen a few minutes before the dinner gong sounded, and scampered upstairs to the tiny skylight room, entering with a studied nonchalance most disarming, in

response to a musical "Come in, little Fairy-godmother!"

Her True Princess was brushing out her hair—it was the psychological moment! Her eyes were bright with the excitement of the check and her gurgling laughter was good to hear. Her first desire had been to stay upstairs and work through dinner time, but Comfort, divining this, had conquered that notion long since.

"Your hair has nice bubbly little curls in it, hasn't it, True Princess?" inquired the small diplomat who was quite as unconscious of being diplomatic as she was of the fact that the reason ugly things hurt her and beautiful effects pleased her, lay in an exquisite heritage. "Don't squinch it back so tight," she added, "it's lots cunninger with the bubbles loose!"

Katherine Woods laughed at her and let her have her way. If she had been able to see, as others would, the radiant vision of happiness that laughed back at her from the blurry glass, she would have admitted that it was cunninger with the bubbles loose. "I forgot to tell you"—there was no deep-laid scheming in the part of Fairy-godmother, but, as has been intimated, she had a love for beautiful effects—"that I was doing some sudsing to-day so I just picked up all the waists that you had hang-

ing behind the calico curtain, and dumped 'em in. I'll iron 'em out for you to-morrow," adding carefully, and with great anxiety: "You can wear your pinky one to-night, can't you?"

"Why, yes"—the comb that was fluffing out bubbles paused in mid-air thoughtfully—"yes, the pink one will do very well to-night. You are very kind to me, little Fairy-godmother, but you must not take time away from yourself or Mrs. Prouty to help me, you know."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't," she replied truthfully, "I never even cut a single potato-peel thicker to get through quick; but I do like that pinky waist," she admitted frankly, "because it always makes me want to kiss your neck where it turns back."

There was a little catch in the laughter of Katherine Woods. The blouse had been one of Mollie's glad gifts to her—a dainty, artistically simple confection that the girl had picked up in a Paris shop the year before she——

"I guess," remarked Fairy-godmother, her point won, "that it's up to me to be making tracks for the kitchen. We have new boarders to-night, so there's an extra veggytubble."

And this was all that Katherine Woods knew about the Prince until she was elaborately intro-

duced to him twenty-five minutes afterward by Mrs. Prouty herself. She acknowledged the introduction in simple, gracious fashion in great contrast to the *empressement* of the head of the *ménage*, promptly forgot all about him and, under the cover of a somewhat noisy anecdote of Miss Prouty's, told Cricket the wonderful news of the day. Fairy-godmother alone was so excited that she tipped the new boarder's soup plate until the hot liquid splashed over her little pink thumb.

"'Scuse me," she murmured—and to add to her embarrassment, the True Princess chanced to glance at her at that moment—"it is a puffickly clean thumb, but it might taste of soap."

Katherine's gaze was riveted by the utter disgust upon the aristocratic countenance of Mr. William Bland as he saw his master's dinner thus ruined, as he fancied, and a wave of her sympathy went out to little Comfort.

Just then she met two laughing gray eyes fixed upon her—eyes that bade her cease from fears and enjoy the incident as it deserved. Instinctively she smiled in return, a gay, comradely lighting of eyes of brown, and felt that she had found a friend.

Cricket caught the exchange of glances and he

smiled too. It was a wistful sort of smile, however, for the man opposite them was a clean-limbed, broad-shouldered, well-set-up young fellow, perhaps five years his junior; a gentleman beyond question, who gave indefinable but unmistakable evidence that Fortune had marked him for her own.

Mr. Charles Prince, for his part, was thoroughly enjoying that dinner, despite the anxious predictions of Mr. Bland whom he had asked Mrs. Prouty to place next him at table. It was as if he were suddenly transported to a new world. He was far more interested in Miss Vincent's department securing all of Smith's output of can-openers than he had ever been in the stock market; and Mr. Short's grandiloquent résumé of what he said "right to old Blithedale's face" held a viewpoint which was absolutely novel to him. But these were absorbing only when the True Princess seemed to become aware of his covert interest in herself. It was at such times, too, that he devoted himself to Miss Gladys Prouty with an amused consideration of her slangy criticisms and apt observations of those with whom she had that day come into contact.

His genuine interest in her was so marked that it occasioned an outburst of maternal pride and admonition in the Prouty bedroom afterward. Miss

Prouty, however, was impatient of her mother's misguided suggestions.

"Now look-a-here, Ma," she said outright, finally, "you've got him sized up all wrong. He ain't crazy over me. He ain't in our class at all. He's another one of them bug-ologist literary people that thinks I'm a 'type' and likes to git me goin'. I'll give him a run fer his money all right, but he can't hand me nothin'. I've got their number, all of them. If you want me to git married, you're a fool to keep tryin' to pick out somebody that ain't our kind. Pick out the best there is of your own kind and hop to it, that's my motto. The best of my kind is Short. I like Short—he's got class—and he likes me. They ain't nothin' more to it jest now, but there will be, for little Gladdie is on the job—that is, there will be if you don't butt in and queer the deal by gittin' me side tracked with a freight car that ain't gonna make no move. Hands off, Ma, an' I'll land what I'm baited for!"

This, even for Miss Prouty, was pretty plain speech, and from that time on her mother aided and abetted her in "landing" her choice of the best of their kind.

The fact that Miss Katherine Woods scarcely noticed the advent of the "new boarder"—or plural,

if Mr. William Bland, the silently disapproving be included—piqued the fairy-tale Prince not a little. He was not accustomed to having his entrance such an unimportant matter in circles feminine, albeit he never realized the fact until it was borne home to him in this instance.

Late that afternoon, Comfort, taking advantage of the excitement and bustle in the arrival of trunks, had whispered to him the story of the "skinny envelope's" coming to the True Princess that morning, and of the laughing and crying and huggings that there had been.

"I 'most busted," Fairy-godmother confided to him with a gurgle, "when she said it must be fairies! She hasn't even got a hunch," she added, hopping from one foot to the other, "and she's so excited that her eyes just shine and shine!"

Even this, however, scarcely prepared him for the luminous-eyed young Princess who seemed to float into the dining room after the others had assembled hungrily. That she scarcely noticed his presence piqued him a little, as has been intimated, but a chuckling consideration of the cause of her abstraction salved his vanity. Fairy-godmother was right, he acknowledged, after surreptitious glances. The True Princess was "puffickly bewtiful." Not per-

haps in the cold, calculating sense of an artist who reckons by some sort of triangulation of charms, but in the warm, sweet human way that takes into account such trivial things as bubbly hair, the fluttering of long eyelashes upon cheeks as softly flushed as a baby's waked from sleep, the quick, startled heaving of delicately rounded bosom under a "pinky" blouse as the sound of her name brings her out of smiling reverie; the lifting of head upon slender throat in quick, birdlike movement, and the wonder of joy thrilling in her voice.

Just how much the feeling of personal responsibility for this joyousness affected his estimate of the modest loveliness of Katherine Woods, one is not willing to conjecture—but one may be quite safe in saying that it did not decrease for him the charm of the occupant of the "squintiest room in the house," for which the rent, he had understood, had been rather precariously overdue. It was difficult to imagine that radiant vision of success a woe-begone, desperate little skeptic of fairies.

Katherine was, indeed, like some elfin sprite of the air, long a prisoner in a befouled dungeon, suddenly released to freedom and her native element. It was not that she chattered much or laughed a great deal. On the contrary, she confined

herself to a few soft-spoken, breathless words that seemed to bubble up from some delicious reverie.

It was in the shabby "parlour" afterward, while Miss Gladys Prouty was banging out a ragtime ditty upon the strident-toned "birch-mahogany instrument," that he introduced himself in character as a reader with Mr. Carruthers—and sort of assistant, you know.

As he stretched his genuinely weary muscles upon a not-too-uncomfortable bed that night, he felt again the same odd thrill of fire at his wrist which had throbbed quite suddenly and unaccountably when Katherine had impetuously flung a soft little hand upon his arm in delighted astonishment.

"Not Mr. John Carruthers, the editor?" she had exclaimed in a tone which he told Carruthers afterward could not have been more impressively enthusiastic if he had said that he was assistant trumpeter to Gabriel when the latter's wind gave out.

He wished that he had been Carruthers to call forth that tone of awesome adoration. By Jove, next to matinee heroes, editors of magazines win the pedestal most often! If women are not revealing their life secrets to them, they're writing stories for them! Funny thing about women's idealizings anyway. . . . But at this point he dropped

into sleep. It was the point at which many a man, better perhaps, or at least older somewhat than Martin, has given up with a sigh and dropped off to sleep.

Bland stole to the door of his master's room and listened. Being satisfied, when no restless sighs assailed his ears, that the change of abode had worked no great ill at least, the elder man—whom Mrs. Prouty's boarders, with the exception of Cricket, had put down at once as "some class"—sought out the "little room next" and slept the sleep of the unrewarded overcareful.

The True Princess gazed long at the stars that winked down at her through the skylight, and the thoughts of her heart that surged with gratitude grew little filmy wings out of tear drops of happiness and flew upward like fairy prayers. . . . At last she slept, and her dreams were oddly mingled absurdities in which she, a princess on a wonderful throne, was receiving "skinny" letters from messengers who were squirrels. Each squirrel, as it hunched itself before her, announced in the clear, pleasant tones of Mr. Charles Prince that he was a reader for Mr. Carruthers.

But most beautiful of all had that evening been to Fairy-godmother who, when she had paused, upon

meeting Mr. Prince in the hall outside his door, had whispered softly:

"Isn't the True Princess wonnerful?"

"She is just that, little Fairy-godmother," he had replied quite seriously—'wonnerful!'"

Less than ever she minded scraping against the dry goods boxes and broken trunk lids as she crept into her little cot that night and hugged Fairy-baby close ere she drowsed into a beautiful dreamless sleep.

"Oh, Fairy-baby," she murmured, when her tired little body had snuggled down between the sheets, rough with mended slits. "Everything is wonnerful, and I'm a really trooly-rooly fairy godmother at last!"

CHAPTER XI

IF JOHN CARRUTHERS had felt a qualm of doubt about the way in which Mr. Charles E. Prince would fit into the position of "reader, acting as assistant editor when he could assist," the hesitation vanished after a few days' experience with his buoyantly enthusiastic and usually practical suggestions, and always incisive judgments.

"The man for Elliot's desk"—the once-blithe and now-suffering Reeves had put it—needed little more than a decent sense of what the public wanted and a keen feeling for style and treatment. The man now at Elliot's desk—for a shift had been made necessary—was already superseding Elliot himself in those matters, and giving besides a touch of personality in his work as charming as himself.

At the end of a week Carruthers found himself saying to the man who had pattered through a course in a famous university beside him:

"It is not so much what you do, Charley, that is your value to us; it is what you don't do. You don't do the regular things. You have not the editorial viewpoint; you have new ideas."

"I seem to be a mental acrobat," Martin confessed, laughing a little ruefully. "I had no notion of the odd sorts of stuff that came into a magazine office. One can pick out only here and there. Like the well-known 'live thunder, I leap from peak to peak the rattling crags among'!"

Carruthers chuckled. "Yet two years in this business and you would be a wonder, Charley!"

"Two years in this business and I should be a maniac, John Carruthers! It has been mighty good for me, however—all of this! Like the rest of my kind, I'm going to start in upon a collecting fad—collecting points of view. I find being a prince most instructive."

The door opened just then in response to Carruthers's "Come in," and Mrs. Ogden entered with a sheaf of letters. Martin instinctively rose to his feet. A lovely flush crept into her cheeks and a queer little pleased smile to her lips. Carruthers caught the fleeting expression and, inhibiting an absent-minded, vague movement toward rising, suddenly settled himself more determinedly and spoke briskly:

"Thank you, Mrs. Ogden. I have given over dictation of letters to all new contributors who are worth while to Mr. Prince for the present. He has

a way of suggesting, in a line, criticism which may develop them into valuable people for us to hold."

"I'm ready for you now, Mrs. Ogden," the new assistant-when-he-could-assist said cheerfully, "if you have time."

Mrs. Ogden inclined her defiant little head in more friendly fashion than Carruthers had ever noted before.

"I will take them now," she said graciously and preceded him out of the room, with again that queer, pleased smile dimpling the corners of her firm little mouth as he held open the door for her.

Carruthers looked after them thoughtfully. He was, in his merciless self-analysis, conscious of the fact that there was a boyish wistfulness tugging at his sophisticated heart. He wished that he had been the one to call forth that flush of pleasure into pretty Mrs. Ogden's creamy skin. The deuce! If after all these years—twelve, to be exact—he was going to become maudlin over a piece of office machinery! He drew the letters to him and scowled prodigiously as the faintest possible perfume, as of a far-off orchard in May, intangibly sweet, eluded his attempts to discover the source of them.

"Humph!" he grunted as he took up his pen . . . and then he looked out into the May morn-

ing where the sun grew hot upon the adjoining roofs.

Despite inward jeerings at himself, however, the wistful tugging at his heart concentrated into an acute pain when, later in the day, Martin came jubilantly into his office dangling an angular wooden toy—an impossible dachshund that "went on wheels."

"It's for Mrs. Ogden's little boy," Martin explained, illustrating its action, oblivious of the fact that Carruthers did not seem enthusiastic over the interruption.

"Didn't know she had one," Carruthers said shortly. He had an unmistakable sense of inadequacy shot through with twinges of—absurd! It couldn't be, of course, but what business had Martin to be buying foreign toys for Mrs. Ogden's little boy that he, Carruthers, was not even aware existed?

"'Oh, my yes!' as my friend Fairy-godmother says, she has a youngster two years old, she told me. Isn't that a fool thing? But Miss Woods, who selected it, says that the laddie will go crazy over it. They all do."

"You have the air of a father of a multitude," was Carruthers's sarcastic observation. Martin flushed.

"Your magazine's idea of efficiency is to be constantly preparing oneself for a bigger job," he retorted. He inspected the toy carefully. "Nasty thing for her to carry home, though. Wish I could use one of the cars occasionally without exciting comment."

"My dear, tender-hearted friend," began Carruthers patronizingly, "Mrs. Ogden is undoubtedly used to carrying bundles of assorted sizes back and forth. She lives—somewhere far out probably."

"No. Shares an apartment with a spinster who decorates interiors—apartment on east side near Neighbourhood House kindergarten where she can leave David during the day," Martin supplied with grinning glibness. Carruthers was really astonished.

"Good lord, man! Do you happen to know what the names of her grandparents were?"

"No," laughed the other, "but I'll find out for you if you really want to know, Jack. I feel sure of one thing," seriously, "that they were quite of the same mettle as yours or mine. In fact, if Mrs. Ogden inherited from them her rarely fine mind and gentle breeding, they might have been a bit better." And with this parting shot Martin disappeared—the dachshund under his arm.

"H'm," commented Carruthers thoughtfully, gazing at the door that had just closed. Then his lips formed into a straight line and his eyes twinkled—not in the least in harmony with the straight line.

"The young interloper of a millionaire!" he said to himself. "We can't have the heads of our staff turned, even if we have to take an editorial hand in the matter."

The next time that Mrs. Ogden entered the room, she felt intuitively a difference in the manner of her chief. It was less impersonally paternal and more personally fatherly. In any event, it was just the sort of attitude that made her accept with weary gratitude the tactfully put suggestion that he take her and the dachshund and the other parcels for little David's birthday—and there seemed to be an assortment of them—home in the car which he drove himself. (He liked the feel of it, he once said.)

Was it his fault that small David, whom they picked up at the Neighbourhood House kindergarten, took a violent fancy to him and quite identified him with the donor of the "doggie"?

When deposited on the sidewalk in front of the building which Mrs. Ogden had indicated, David wailed loudly and inconsolably.

"Man nubbin'," he insisted with childish sobs,

"Muvver, man nubbin'," Carruthers fingered the visor of his tweed cap in perplexity. He was accustomed to interpreting various sorts of dialect, but this was too much for him.

"Should you mind translating?" he asked, whimsically, as he delivered up the various packages in the gloomy entrance of the building. He could not see the flush that grew hot in her cheeks but he noted the tremulousness of her laugh as she replied:

"He wants you to share his bread and milk with him. We hope that you will not mind his hospitality. There, Sonny Boy, that is quite enough. Your man will not love you if you cry."

The laddie instantly stopped, though the suddenness of the effort caused a slight choking.

"Oh, if that is all," Carruthers said, relievedly, "the trouble is easily remedied. I shall be delighted to accept, Sonny Boy—even though your hospitality does not seem to be hereditary."

"Oh—would you, really?" There was no mistaking the delight of the elder of the two Ogden children. "Mrs. Larson is a mighty dependable cook even if she can't talk—and Miss Prudhomme is away so we're having strawberry shortcake. Miss Prudhomme thinks that short cake is plebeian," with a little *moue*—"but I love it!"

"And I," agreed Carruthers, heartily and very suddenly—for he had not a notion of what "it" was. His sense of words was quite blurred in his overwhelming astonishment at what he, conservative John Carruthers, was doing simply because two pairs of limpid eyes had been wistful when he had turned to go!

When he promised David—with a friendly good-night kiss for him and doggie—that he would come on Sunday to take him out into the country in the "choo-choo" that had brought him home, he had forgotten that he was due at a rather distinguished week-end party on that particular date. His note of regret, however, concerning the unexpected business which detained him in town was so charmingly worded to his fashionable hostess that she smiled sweetly and forgave him in a vast pity over the frightful demands made upon literary people.

CHAPTER XII

SINCE even the most hard-headed of scientists seem no whit surprised when very bunglesome and unattractive chrysalides suddenly debouch upon the sunlit air the most marvellous of butterflies, one who believes in fairies cannot be amazed at the change which was to be discovered in Katherine Woods. Certainly nothing in her drab little girlhood in the Southern rectory or in the grubworm existence she had led in New York City, gave promise of such radiant feminine frivolity and witchery of loveliness. Of course, however, one might imagine a female biologist and student of her own sex's vagaries saying, with an adjustment of spectacles, "It was latent."

Fairy-godmother—who alone was taken into confidence when, within the week, a joyous idea had developed into a madly written, five-thousand-word story and thence into a three-hundred-dollar check from a widely circulated weekly which delighted in its whimsical fancy—Fairy-godmother had the real solution of the metamorphosis: "Fairies."

"Why, Fairy-godmother," Katherine had gurgled, hugging the slim little figure tightly, "I didn't know there was so much money in the world! What shall I do with it all?"

And then Fairy-godmother demonstrated that she was of mortal as well as of fairy substance in womankind, for after a long, thoughtful pause in which she seemed to be weighing the matter carefully, giving due attention to arguments pro and con, she said decisively:

"I'd buy the beautifulest clothes in the world!"

She never knew why her True Princess fell in a heap on the bed with rippling laughter that would not be stilled, nor why she came over to her again and held her close as she whispered with the tiniest catch in her voice:

"Do you think that—anybody would notice?"

"Oh, my, yes!" the child had replied quite candidly. "I think that Mr. Prince likes to see people *chick!*"

As Fairy-godmother had intimated on another occasion, Miss Woods's "chickness" was not quite the "chickness" of Miss Prouty, however, and, save for a marvellous blending of tints in the fabrics of her unobtrusively well-cut garments—shades of colour that brought out the luminous depths of her

eyes and the exquisite rose texture of her skin, one would have noted no difference in the attire of the True Princess after Fairy-godmother had waved the wand of her suggestion.

To the Prince himself the transformation was the opening of a flower which revealed its true heart to him as the petals unfolded. She was very lovely, he thought—with all the dainty allure of the women with whom he had been thrown all of his life, added to an indescribable charm of ingenuousness that veiled a hint of mystery. He seemed to touch at times a hidden reservation baffling in the limpid clarity of her frankness about herself, of her loving reminiscences of the life at the rectory in the South, and the little anecdotes of the childish pranks of her sister Mollie and herself. Mollie, he understood, had died soon after the invalid mother had gone, but it was rather an inference from her unrevealments, and the sudden grief that came into her eyes when she spoke of the younger sister.

Tactfully he led her away from such memories when they beset her, and her eagerness to follow, to forget the unavailing sorrow, aided him. She was so wholly a child yet so utterly a woman—and as both, so entirely desirable! He gave himself up to loving her as freely and as gladly as a boy in his

teens welcomes his first love. It was surely a new sensation to the world-weary young man who had been accustomed to wonder sardonically how the flavour of sweetness in the smiles granted him would sour if he suddenly were bereft of the very well-known name and fortune of Martin.

There was a breathlessness about meeting her suddenly in the dusky, ill-ventilated hallways; a thrill in the touch of her slippered foot as they exchanged delicious confidences of nothing over a tiny table in an out-of-the-way little restaurant after an evening at a play which they viewed from the balcony.

Perhaps it was because Martin knew the haunts of his friends so well, perhaps because he seemed so utterly indifferent whether or not he met any of them, that only once he caught sight of a familiar face. It was Pierre Le Jeune, the very promising young artist whom Martin had befriended in obscure days—who, in fact, owed his present vogue to the picture which Martin had purchased quite recently for the Metropolitan, with an enthusiastic welcome on the part of the Accession Committee and other powers that be. It was the sort of thing that Martin planned to do with his Browne canvas when he could make up his mind to be parted from it. After

Le Jeune had rushed up to him there in the shabby little café—for it was the first glimpse that the artist had had of his old friend since the latter's return from abroad—Martin made up his mind that the custom of not recognizing artists until after they are dead is deep rooted in wisdom. Le Jeune had poured out his emotions so volubly in French that Martin felt uncomfortably certain that his gestures alone must have revealed the tenor of his remarks.

Katherine had smiled appreciatively as the artist rushed away as excitedly as he had come, and Martin was fumbling over excuses and explanations for not having introduced to her such a desirable person as Pierre Le Jeune. He could not tell her the truth—that, with a Gallic turn of mind and an imagination which revelled in adventure, Le Jeune had undoubtedly put his own construction upon the fact that the fastidious young millionaire was dining quite sociably in an out-of-the-way restaurant with a most charming, luminous-eyed young goddess. Martin's hand gripped the napkin across his knee with the thought, and his lips closed in a straight line. Then he caught her looking at him anxiously. The tender solicitude of that gaze brought him to himself.

"I can't quite explain to you, True Princess," he

said gently, "but I didn't want you to know Le Jeune because—because, save when he is painting, he doesn't believe in fairies!"

She did not quite altogether comprehend, although the sweet protection of his air as he told her thus boyishly brought a delicious warm glow to her cheeks.

"You will forgive me—True Princess?" He asked it softly, laying a hand lightly upon the slender fingers that drooped idly over the edge of the table. Something in her throat suddenly choked her so that she could not answer, and even long afterward, when she had crept into the little bed in the skylight room where one may see the stars, she was a little dizzy as she pressed those fingers passionately to her lips.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. PROUTY was as usual immersed in the society news of the paper that partially hid her flowing figure at the head of the table, and Mr. Short had just leaned across to select fastidiously a well-pointed toothpick from the ever-ready, somewhat dusty glass holder that graced the centre of the table, when Cricket entered in less jaunty fashion than was his wont. Something new had come into Cricket's life—or, to word it more accurately, a new phase of an old experience—for Cricket was not a stranger to disappointment. One gift alone he had—the gift that good fairies are wont to bestow when they know that, for some inscrutable reason which the greatest minds have never been able quite to fathom, a life is destined to be lived under a dark star. This gift is the vision of the philosopher. Cricket had an odd sense of values for a man whose life had been given up to the study of formal law—the law that man makes so queerly to adjust differences.

He had a fashion, one of his instructors in the

modest Western college which he had attended had once said of him, of "seeing the inside of things.

Perhaps this was the reason why he felt—despite a tugging at the heart-strings that would not be stilled as he saw the new beauty and joy and wonderful blossoming of love in the eyes of her to whom he had given his heart's all—that it was a glorious privilege to love her, to be her friend; to accept, in return for his devotion, those gentle little favours and softly regretful indulgences which a woman bestows upon an unsuccessful lover. It was as if he had been expecting such a *dénouement*, for Fairy-godmother had given forth the keynote of his service when she had said that gnomes could be kind and useful, but, after all, they could never be princes. It was a sort of odd whimsy, he thought, that even the lucky fellow's name should bear its testimony of his fitness for the rôle he had assumed straightway upon his appearance at the Prouty ménage.

It was Bland who most bothered Cricket—Bland whose attitude toward his "friend," Mr. Prince, seemed so ill-sorted with the footing of intimacy. They seemed genuinely fond of each other; in fact, Mr. William Bland was wretched, apparently, when Prince was out of his sight. He worried over him as a mother hen does about a missing chick; and

Prince took these evidences of obsequious devotion with a nonchalance that occasionally exasperated Cricket. He liked Prince, liked him immensely; but why the devil didn't he either stop Bland's eternal toadying to him or else accept it as a grace instead of a desert? That Bland was below him in mental calibre and in education was obvious—to Cricket alone, be it said, however, for the rest of the Prouty boarders were far more impressed by Mr. Bland's severe British reserve than by the geniality of Mr. Charles E. Prince.

"This room"—Comfort overheard Mrs. Prouty saying to a prospective boarder who had come to "look over" the top floor room advertised, and was just then passing Bland's door on the way down —"is occupied by a Mr. Bland—Mr. William Bland who belongs to the nobility in England. He and Mr. Short—such a distinguished-looking man!—are in Blithedale's. Mr. Short has this room; he won't mind if I show you. It has such a lovely view of the sun when it ain't smoky. Oh, I'm awfully p'ticular who I take, for this ain't a boarding-house, you know; we're all just like one big family!"

But that's really neither here nor there—as Mrs. Prouty herself would tell you—for as Cricket entered the dining room this particular morning, a shade less

blithely than his wont, he was greeted by a remark from Miss Gladys Prouty who was rather hastily consuming her breakfast—the result of Mr. Short's finality in reaching for the toothpicks. The journey to Blithedale's was far more interesting if it were not made alone.

"I hear," Miss Prouty interrogated with her mouth full, "that you've went in for literachure, too, Mr. Cricket?"

Cricket smiled as he replied modestly: "Not quite over my depth, so far, Miss Gladys. Mr. Prince wanted me to do an article involving a certain phase of international law that has some bearing on the present crisis. This is my sole offence."

"Well, this joint is getting too highbrow for little Gladdus, I'm here to tell you," she rose and carefully fluffed her hair, twiddled with the collar that rammed into her *medulla oblongata*, but fell away to a mere nothing in the front—with a suggestion of pneumonia if the weather changed. "Ma and me will have to be movin' out to some place where they take an intrust in some'n besides gittin' a 'rally delightful atmosphah, don't you know,' and developin' a 'veerility of style." (Cricket laughed in genuine amusement at the words in a careful imitation of Prince's enthusiastic tone.) "Gawsh! I'm

tickled to death to git back to the ribbons nex' mornin'. Come along to work, Shorty!"

"True for you, Miss Gladys," Cricket laughed at her. "You have the patter of the *littérateur !*"

"Oh, us bugs," she remarked as she flashed through the door with Mr. Short, "takes an occasion'l squint upward."

Cricket was silent, but he looked after Miss Prouty's "chick" figure through the window with a new respect. After all, he *had* been guilty of microscopic investigation with a patronizingly scientific air! To say that he did not know when Miss Woods entered would indicate exactly how deep was his reverie.

"Oh, here you are, girlie!" It was Mrs. Prouty's voice that aroused him first and brought a comradely return of the girl's happy little nod of greeting. "Comfort!" Mrs. Prouty was all attention now to the wants of the newly arrived. "Bring Miss Woods some hot breakfast food. I was just wondering what had became of you, deerie! Did you sleep well? I'm thinkin' of gittin' a new mattress for your bed; but I suppose you'll be wantin' to take a lower-down room one of these days if checks keep comin' in so fast! There—now git some more cream, Comfort—the thickest is in the blue pitcher.

I was savin' some for you. Nobody can't say I'm not good to my boarders. I don't know what I should do without my little family! I was tellin' somebody yestiddy that come to see if my skylight was vacant, 'Oh, deary me,' says I, 'you can't have that—no, indeedy! The young lady that has that,' I says, 'is a prominunt novelust an' I love her as if she was my own daughter.'"

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Prouty," acknowledged the True Princess softly. "I'm sure I had not even thought of a change! I love that little room. I've been there so long that no other would seem quite like home to me."

"Then that settles it. I'll buy a new mattress this very day." Mrs. Prouty spoke with a proud magnificence that was swiftly metamorphosed into an elephantine coyness as she added: "Of course I don't know how long you'll be here, though, deerie —this runnin' off noon hours to a nart exhibition or some'n, and to the theatre nearly every night looks mighty suspicious—don't it, Mr. Prince? Ain't it th' trooth, now?" The last query was for Martin's benefit as he swung blithely into the room—but, whether or not he had heard the previous remark, Katherine's painfully flushed cheeks would have brought swift assurance of its tenor.

"Above all things—good morning everybody, including Mr. Bland." ("Sit down, you idiot!" he interposed in the latter's ear.) "Let us not have the truth so early in the morning! Later in the day one may be able to face disagreeables—but not before morning coffee. Why, little Fairy-godmother, your eyes are as bright this morning as if you had slept on rose-petals."

"I had the wonnerfulest dream," she whispered to him under pretext of replacing a fork, "'bout you an'—anduh'—you know." With a delicious gurgle of laughter she slipped away to the kitchen. When she returned her face was docilely composed, save for a surreptitious wink bestowed upon Martin as Mrs. Prouty was saying:

"Did you have good seats, Miss Woods?"

"Oh, splendid, Mrs. Prouty," the girl answered with soft eagerness. "I really didn't need Miss Vincent's opera glasses at all, but it was so kind of her to loan them! And we could hear almost every word!"

There was in Martin's eyes just that moment the sort of look that he often bestowed upon Comfort when she was revealing to him happily some pitifully meagre delight. How he would make it up to them—those two wonderful children who believed

in fairies and were so ready to deck in beauty some skeleton of good! How he had loved to watch his princess the night before, absorbed in the play, keen to enjoy the rather subtle humour, the delicate satire of the thing; yet with quick tears or smiles of sympathy as some humaner touch appealed to her. That swift flashing of her eyes to his for assurance of mutual understanding, of a heart *en rapport* with hers in appreciation, gave him a sensation which he had never experienced before. None of the women at whose side he had dawdled through a musical comedy or chatted through an opera had affected him like this. He wondered once, with a remnant of the old attitude of mind—was the balcony really making him plebeian?

"Yes; they were good seats. I rather like the last row upstairs myself. It gives one such a—er—breadth of view, you know." He faltered because Bland's eyes had almost popped out of his head.

"Oh, sir," began the man, horrifiedly, "did you see . . . "

"Shut up, Bland," Martin whispered, under pretext of picking up his napkin—(it was well that Martin had insisted on having Bland sit next!)—"and, for the love of heaven, don't call me 'sir'."

There was a silence as Bland gulped his food, and

Cricket, who could not hear but interpreted the scene in a way that threw his sympathy to the Englishman, bided his time.

"Your cakes is so cold it's jest a crime, Mr. Prince," Mrs. Prouty regretted. "If you wait a minute I'll have some hot ones for you." Martin caught Bland eyeing his master's soggy disks with real anguish and said jovially:

"These are all right, Mrs. Prouty. You know if I had cakes as good as this when I'm hunting up in New Brunswick, I'd think I was in clover."

"How are the sprigged muslins selling now, *Mister* Bland?" Bland was so agitated that he choked over his coffee and supreme misery reigned within him. Martin undertook to explain the situation:

"Mr. Bland—Bill, my old friend—is the most enthusiastic dry-goods specialist that I ever knew! When we are alone in the evening I cannot keep him off the subject. Sprigged muslins have a fascination for him especially. I was sorry that there was no opening in that department when he applied, for he takes really less interest in damasks, but Mr. Short has promised him the first vacancy. He chatters incessantly about designs and weaves and —all that, you know," Martin continued impishly.

"I suppose that is why he is so reticent at table. If you have ever noticed, he will not mention them at all, and when questioned is very conservative. One must be when one has a hobby, else one is likely to bore others, don't you think so, Cricket?" For Martin suddenly caught the latter's eyes fixed upon him.

"Mr. Bland has my entire sympathy," replied Cricket inscrutably and Bland flashed him a grateful glance as he rose to withdraw, moving with a stately grace to the door.

"Bill!" Martin's voice choked with mirth as the man turned upon the threshold with disgust of the world writ large upon his features. "Bill, would you have the goodness to stop at that little shop on Columbus Avenue where we left my shoes the other evening, and see if they are done? I shall be detained. I may take dinner with Mr. Carruthers; you need not wait up." Then suddenly Martin flashed an uneasy glance about the table, but no one seemed to have noticed the words, save Cricket. There was a queer expression in Cricket's eyes, and Martin hastily covered the effect of his own words and Bland's obsequious, "Yes, Mr. Prince!" with a laughing flippancy as the man clanged the outer door.

"Poor old Bland! At heart he's the best fellow in the world—is Bill, but he takes himself very, very seriously. That is the British of it I suppose." Katherine looked across at him with a sudden smile.

"I think that the friendship between you two is charming. You are so different, yet so close; almost like brothers."

Martin started. "Brothers?" He paused; then he said slowly: "Yes, I suppose we are—brothers! It seems queer, doesn't it? Good old Bland—and I make his life unbearable!"

"Usually," laughed Katherine, "it is the older brother that is the despot, so perhaps turn about is fair enough." Cricket sent her an oddly approving glance which Martin, in his abstraction, did not see.

"I had not realized that my attitude toward Bland was—unbrotherly, Miss Woods"—he was thinking aloud, it seemed—"but the trouble is that sometimes people are brought up all wrong. They get the notion—Lord knows how it started—that because somebody does one kind of work and somebody else does another kind of work they are not related. Somebody began slicing the sorts of work in the world in layers of above and below instead of in vertical divisions which would bring together the best workmen in their various 'jobs.'" He smiled,

and the smile held, to Cricket's notion, an implication of regretful superiority—thus it grated on his soul.

"There's not such a tremendous difference as all that, is there, Mr. Prince," he drawled gently, "between this unjustly divided stratum of magazine readers and the stratum of dry-goods clerks—even in the present arrangement?"

The shot went home, and for the first time in her life Katherine Woods flashed a hostile glance at Cricket—a glance that warned him what the price of further enmity to Prince would be. He smiled a queer little smile and decided that it wasn't worth while. Cricket, you see, was a philosopher.

"No, there is not so very much difference," Martin was saying, with a slightly heightened colour. More than any man alive, he believed, he hated snobbishness, yet it was as futile to try to put in one class all the dwellers upon the face of the earth as it would be to fit out a machine with all the same kind of parts. It was that which he had been trying to make clear—which had come home to him most keenly in Katherine's idly uttered words. "No difference at all, in fact, save that the one or the other is the better at his particular job. Then the fellow that is of the most use in pushing this old world on, wins, I think; don't you?"

"Quite philosophic," murmured Cricket, with gentle satire.

"One has a right to be philosophic, Cricket," Martin said with that winning smile that had gained him friends in a ruffled directors' meeting more than once, "when one has proved that one's theories are correct by one's failure in practising their opposite."

With generous warmth Cricket held out his hand as he passed Martin on his way to the door.

"You're all right, Prince," he said heartily, "but I'm afraid that you are rather overmodest. I hope that your theory regarding my ability to put over that article on international law is not going to be disproved. . . . As for our True Princess here, she is positively growing affluent through your magazine."

"But it isn't only Mr. Prince's magazine," she said eagerly, "it's ever so many others' now!"

"And Prince started you on your career!" Cricket's resignation was mockingly full of grief. "Well, I don't blame you for going to the greatest Broadway success with him—but don't forget that my turn comes to-night for that new musical comedy. I have seats in the first row in the balcony"—he coughed with great *empressement*—"the fir-r-rst

row in the bal-co-ny, Prince! Kindly notice—fir-r-rst row!" The trill was absurdly emphatic.

"Oh, well," grinned Prince, "what can a mere magazine reader hope to do against a divinely gifted attorney and a popular writer on international law? Bye the bye, you are likely to get a communication from Mr. Carruthers to-day requesting more of the articles."

"You alarm me," murmured Cricket, lifting an eyebrow. "I hope that he does not expect me to do them more cheaply by the dozen!" He paused on the threshold. "You aren't coming subway-ward now, Prince?"

"No, I must have one more of Mrs. Prouty's excellent cakes—the hot ones. I'll be along in a few minutes, but don't let me detain you."

"Thanks," dryly, "I shall not." He shrugged into his light coat and left them—the girl that he loved and the man who, he knew, had left him miles behind and was all but in at the goal. It takes courage, sometimes, to be a philosopher.

"The finest chap I have met in many a long day," said Martin softly, glancing at the sturdy little figure which had paused in the area way to light a cigar. "Staunch to the core. No wonder Fairy-godmother calls him 'the good Mr. Gnome'!" At

that moment Cricket turned to the window and lifting his hat high in blithe farewell, mounted the steps to the street. There was a rush of admiration that swelled Martin's heart at that instant—the sort of thrill that comes to shut out hint of pity when a good comrade salutes as he turns on his heel to undertake a mission bound to be tragic.

CHAPTER XIV

THE silence in the mussy breakfast room that followed this burst of enthusiasm on Martin's part, the cause for which Katherine intuitively divined, became unbearable to the girl. Most of all she had longed for just such precious moments as these where there was none to urge upon them the petty affairs of daily routine—and yet now that the beloved time had come, womanlike, she fled from it. Martin raised grave eyes, in which a twinkle lurked, as she hesitatingly rose.

"Surely work is not so pressing that you must leave me with a single mouthful of cake unconsumed?" She flushed hotly under his teasing, and he reflected that he liked her shyness much better than the easy, coquettish poise of the women with whom he had played the game of hearts lightly and prettily. When one expected her to be a woman, she proved a child: when one might have expected the unwisdom of a child, she astonished him with the mystery of her mind—its grasp of things he had himself but touched upon.

"You see," she told him, "we are rather disgracefully late. If it were not that you are so unaccountably a favourite of Stepmother's, I fear that something would be said about keeping the table waiting. You are what we used to call at boarding-school a regular teacher's pet." She tried to be very severe, and quite succeeded in covering up the divine confusion that filled her with the memory of the night before. Did his fingers tingle still with the thought of the touch? Of course they didn't. Only girls were so foolish—girls, who, as he had said in that dear protecting way he had, still believed in fairies!

"Teacher's pet!" he mused. "Wouldn't that phrase amuse my poor old tutor! How I used to bedevil him! I remember the summer he took me to England. . . ." He stopped suddenly—awkwardly. "How I am romancing, to be sure," he said with a short laugh.

She was looking at him with grave, level eyes, eyes that for the first time seemed to look into him searchingly in simple inability to harmonize this fact with his life as she had fancied it.

"'Tutor,'" she repeated slowly, "'Summer in England.' Doesn't that sound rather—affluent?"

"Oh, living's cheaper abroad, you know," Martin was a bit chagrined to hurl this platitude at her

—but, to tell the truth, he was suddenly taken, "and I was horribly stupid at school! Would not study, you know, so Dad made me have coaching outside, you see." It was plausible surely—yet there was an unaccustomed glibness in the explanation that did not quite have the stamp of genuineness. No, it was not fact which assailed her consciousness, it was a more subtle thing—an indefinable intuition.

"I—see." She caught at the last word in an attempt to make reply. Something about him was —different, and she looked at him with grave thoughtfulness.

"You speak of affluence as if it were—a disease," he said, not without irritation; for once or twice, in abstract discussion of wealth, she had evinced a bitterness that seemed foreign to her gentle nature.

"Not always," she smiled at him.

"Suppose you should suddenly discover that I, for instance, belonged to the accursed rich"—he laughed at her with that winning charm that women found it difficult to resist—"would you—quite hate me?"

Her eyes grew wide with sudden fear and then she laughed serenely and mirthfully as a child.

"No-o; perhaps not, quite. But——"

"But what?"

"You would fail to interest me any longer—that's all."

Martin fell all of a heap.

"Oh!" he commented, with a world of satire in his tone, "is that all?"

Katherine smiled in spite of herself.

"Well, you see," she explained, "I like you because you are so tremendously interested in your work."

"Or in yours." He chuckled triumphantly.

She flushed and laughed back at him with real appreciation. "Quits!" she said. "And you are right, of course. I do appreciate the wonderful help you have been to me. But that is all beside the question. If you were not really interested—if you were taking it up as a fad, this sort of thing—it would be different."

"One must work for money, then, to be interested?"

She faltered—caught in her own mesh. "I'm sorry," she said simply, "but, save for the people who give themselves up for some great cause, it is true."

"But suppose," he said, softly, "just suppose that I were giving myself up to some great cause—were

working with that alone in view—thinking of it by day and dreaming of it by night"—(there was a look in his eyes that, however much she loved it, however much she had longed for it, made her suddenly want to run away), "couldn't you forgive me, then—Katherine?"

"Dear me!" exclaimed a clear, childish treble at the doorway, "I hadn't a mite of a hunch that anybody was still at the eats!"

With that delicious understanding which may exist only between those who love and know that the love of the other is sure, they looked at each other—Fairy-godmother's Prince and True Princess—and laughed softly.

"Come here, little Fairy-godmother." Martin stretched out his hand to the child with the smiling masterfulness that had caused hearts under richer material than faded gingham to go pit-a-pat. "I want the True Princess to go about the shops with you to-day and see if she cannot find some little garments just your size——"

"But I have plenty," protested Fairy-godmother shyly. "I really couldn't use any more." Then, fearing that she had hurt his feelings, she added hastily: "Of course I just love my new handychiffs, and my park shoes."

"Park shoes?"

"Yes, those that you got for my Sunday-school shoes, where I couldn't go on account of the peeling," she reminded him, "I've been three times parking and squirrelling in them."

"With squirrelling shoes and handkerchiefs—what more could the soul of woman want?" Katherine's eyes twinkled as she put the query to him very gravely. Comfort looked at her in puzzled attempt to grasp the significance of the remark, and with the glance came an enthusiastic notion.

"I'd much rather you got the white feather hat for Princess," she said with startling suddenness.

"To be perfectly frank with you, Fairy-godmother," Martin replied, trying to hold his voice to gravity when he heard the amazed little gasp in the slender throat that grew faintly pink, "I should much rather buy it; but I am afraid that she will not let me—yet!" It was a mean advantage and he knew it.

The final word brought a wonderful flood of colour to the rose-petal cheeks of the True Princess. He promptly absolved himself; the end certainly justified any means.

Fairy-godmother's face, which had lighted up at the beginning of his reply, fell disappointedly.

"It is a *chick* and princessy little shape," she advised him regretfully, "quite as modish as anything we've seen, and white feathers are so good this season! She's promised to buy it as soon as some more skinnies come; don't you think that you could hustle 'em any?" The beautiful flowerlike face was lifted to his earnestly. The contrast between the words and the exquisite fineness of soul that shone through the windows under the broad white brow of the artist's child made a queer tightness in the throat of the young millionaire who was playing at being a beggar prince.

"I'll try, little fairy girl," he said gently; "but meanwhile take this"—he tucked a bill into her hand—"and ask the Princess to go with you, as soon as she can find time, to choose some little things —*chick* little models," he smiled, "for yourself."

The child unfolded the bill and gazed at it curiously. She had never seen one just like it before, and as Martin caught the swift expression of delighted surprise that flitted across the face of the girl who stood there, the warmth of benevolence to which he had been a stranger for more days than ever before in his life glowed about his heart. His generosity was gaining him applause from the most select and exclusive audience in the world! A hint

of the thought flashed into his mind—he was far more nearly mentally honest than benefactors of his class are like to be—and seared the joy a bit. Katherine was glad and proud of him for being generous to a little boarding-house slavey! He did not dare to tell her that in his possession was a Browne canvas for whose beauty and meaning to him he could never pay—though he had given for it more bills like that in the childish palm than he cared to contemplate, since no appreciable fraction of them had ever reached the widow of the struggling artist, or his baby girl.

Fairy-godmother punctiliously returned the bill to its original crisp folds and handed it back to him gravely.

"It is a very nice newy one," she said, gently, so that he might not be hurt, "but you'd better put it in the bank, for you might be sick again. Besides——"

"Besides what, Fairy-godmother?" Martin was honestly aghast at her refusal. He felt, in fact, rather foolish.

She drew her straight brows together in a conscientious effort to make the thing clear to him.

"Well, you see, fairy godmothers don't need

things for theirselves," she explained slowly, slipping a hand into his to take away the sting of the words; one must not hurt a mortal heart even to uphold fairy tradition; "so they don't take things. They—they just—give 'em."

And Charles Martin, the benefactor, the sought after, the flattered and coddled millionaire, suddenly saw things with fairy eyes—and knew that aside from the love of two pure-hearted believers in fairies, he was very, very poor indeed!

Fairy-godmother had danced away to the kitchen, and Martin's eyes, as he raised them to the girl's, had a new humility in them that her heart yearned over. What a boy he was, she thought; and how innocently cruel a child may be!

"You do so much!" she said to him gently. "You must not spoil us all. Think of what you have done for me!" It was her dear way of comforting him, he knew that. It was an odd sensation; he never remembered a woman's binding up his wounds before. "It's—it's been splendid! Really, I'll confess: if that first story had not been accepted before I knew you, I might have thought—I should have thought," she strengthened her words bravely, "that your influence had something to do with it—that your knowing me made a difference."

Despite himself Martin was startled to have her, as the children say in games, "getting warmer." Still he had the feeling that one of these days he should have to face a partial confession of the truth at least, and he wanted to know how she had reasoned out the matter in her own mind.

"Perish the thought, Princess Katherine," he said lightly. "Mr. Carruthers has final say always. None could move him even if he would." (He wondered now how they were going to explain non-publication.)

"Yes, I know," thoughtfully; "but it was—odd. He sent it back at first, you know."

"Really?" His astonishment was well feigned.

"Yes; and then, just a few days afterward—two days before you came, I believe it was—I received a nice letter from him explaining that they had not meant to send it back at all. That the wrong card, or something, had got into the manuscript—a mistake of the mailing person's—and that he had intended to offer me a hundred dollars for it and ask to see another one right away! Two hundred whole dollars! I did not know there was so much money in the world!" tremulously.

"Poor little soul!" The look in his eyes again made his Princess rush ahead in delicious confusion:

"Perhaps ever so many undiscovered mistakes occur that way in magazine editorial rooms! It is inexcusable carelessness!"

Martin shook his head with a weight of gravity at the shocking affair. "Carelessness, my dear girl, is the curse of the age!"

"That check made my life over, Mr. Prince," she said dreamily. "No one"—she paused and made a swift mental reservation to those words, for she knew that some day she would tell him all about the little white box and the friendly squirrel—"no one will ever know how near I came to——"

"Don't say it, True Princess," he pleaded in genuine grief, laying his hand swiftly over hers, and withdrawing it as swiftly when she gave a little gasp at the shock of it. "That sort of thing is a coward's way of solution at best."

"I—I know," she faltered. "I, least of all, should think of it, for the horror and the evil of that way out of things has been brought very close home to me!" Her slender fingers went to her throat and for a second the lovely face was white in her effort for control. "I—didn't mean to be a baby," she added swiftly with a misty smile. "All I meant to confess was that Mr. Carruthers saved me from desperate thoughts and a struggle to—to keep on

with life." She was standing at the foot of the stairs in the dusky hall-way, and her face was in shadow, but he knew the tears lurked near.

"It is a struggle no longer?" He could not trust himself too near her, so, quite as if he were indeed the practical young business man that he pretended to be, he reached for the neat and serviceable ready-made top coat which was Bland's abhorrence. He was trembling like a schoolboy. That dark days should have come to his princess when he was not by to help! That the unselfish soul of her should have been so nearly overwhelmed with its burden! A single sob, the merest choking of tears as she spoke to him there from the shadows, and he would have taken her in his arms and poured out the whole story of his love, of what he planned to do for her, of the visioned future in which she was to be a real princess.

Instead, at his question, she laughed—the loveliest, gurgliest laugh in the world, that welled from a soul content and at peace, and poured itself forth goldenly as the song of a bird!

"A struggle!" She clasped her hands in delight. "It's fun! Oh, I never thought it possible to love living—just living—as I do now! I can hardly wait to get to my typewriter! I have to say to myself: 'Now, Katherine Woods person, you must take a

walk! Mr. Prince, who has a kindly interest in your stories, says that you must take proper exercise every day.' So I walk, and walk, and walk! If it is sunshiny, it is glorious—all glinty and goldy; if it is raining, it is glorious, too—little sputtery drops splashing on my nose and against my cheeks just like the wet kisses of little baby fairies."

"You're the dearest dear that the fairies ever permitted to live out of Fairyland!" He was drawing nearer and his voice was deep and dangerously thrilling. She hastened on to inconsequential things. She saw him reach out his hand blindly, gropingly, and, with the instinct of woman who knows that no lure is so potent as of that which is out of reach, she clasped her hands idly behind her head and leaned against the wall with face provokingly upturned.

"I had the most glorious day of all yesterday," she told him with an abandon of joyousness that gave the tones of her voice a luscious sweetness. "It was an orgy!"

"What did you do—spend twenty-five cents for luncheon when you could have got one that would do for fifteen, or did you give your best frock to some one who looked needy?"

Martin realized that he was fatuously in love, but he was helpless against it. He wanted to be

helpless. He knew that he had never in his life been so deliriously happy as he was at that moment, standing there in the dusky hall-way of a middle-class boarding-house near to the girl for whom he had come to care so passionately that nothing in the whole world mattered save that which concerned her. And the delicious game they were playing; surely no finished coquette of his acquaintance could have kept him in that exquisite balance for so long a time! He knew that his eyes told the story each time that they rested deep in hers; he knew, too, that her sensitive nerves quivered at his lightest touch; yet it was as if she feared that mortal words would turn the wonder of the fairy gift to dross.

"You are not listening to me," she accused, softly—breathlessly, for he was very near. He started guiltily.

" . . . And, as we were feeding the squirrels in the park, I told Fairy-godmother that story of yours—about how a lad had come there and had sat on the bench—poor and friendless and desperate" (he did not know what memories the story had awaked in her!) "having nowhere to go—when a squirrel climbed upon his knee and went into his pockets and found there a peanut left from the lunch of two days before. I think you said that he had not had anything to eat for two days?"

"Two days," Martin replied gravely, "and then only peanuts. It was clever of the squirrel. I believe that it gave the lad a job finally, didn't it?"

"Don't jest about it," pleaded Katherine gently. "I love that story! You said that it had happened to some one whom you had heard about—some famous person or other"—she paused with a little swallow of something in her throat—"but I—knew—who it was right away! That poor, lonely, friendless lad was—*you!*"

"I?" Martin was so actually aghast that he stepped back. "I? Good lord!"

"Yes, you! You couldn't deceive me for one moment!"

"A woman's intuition is the most wonderful thing in the world!" he commented, humorously nonplussed.

"And—I liked to think of you—that way," the little True Princess went on. "I mean, we did—Fairy-godmother and I—for I told her what I had discovered. We spoke of how we wished that we could have known you then and—helped you."

"A woman's sympathy is the most wonderful thing in the world." The words were almost the same, but the tone was again reaching the danger point, so she hurried on:

"And then I came home and worked like mad—pounded away on a story that I'm sure is quite the best I've ever done. See how hard I worked! I broke my nail!"

She held out the hand to him, and he really meant to take it and examine the blunted pinky nail quite scientificaliy but—somehow—as he lifted it to his bent head, it suddenly quivered against his lips—The faintest imaginable soupçon of perfume clung to it and made him a bit dizzy—oh, what's the use? Martin, the austere (so far as love was concerned), the rigidly self-mastered Martin, who had escaped the lure of moonlight nights on luxurious yachts, and love among the ruins of old gardens across the sea, lost his head in the dusky, ill-ventilated hallway of—— But it really was not that at all, you know, for a fairy godmother had been at work upon the lives she wanted to influence. Suddenly it was a palace about them, and he was a prince in very truth for he had caught the slender, swaying form of the True Princess and held it throbbing deliriously against him while his lips crushed down upon hers!

"Only three new spots on the tablecloth!" announced Fairy-godmother surprisedly in the dining room. "What d'ye know about that?"

CHAPTER XV

IT IS a platitude that nothing so serves to arouse and maintain a romantic interest as a touch of mystery in the beloved—a pool of the Other Self that defies all fathoming. If Martin felt this in regard to Katherine, her own consciousness was no less keen to acknowledge itself delightfully baffled at times in its attempts to understand him wholly. It was not so much an occasional haphazard admission—such as the rather unusual education he had received in some respects—as the fact that he afterward attempted to cover up or explain away such revealments in a boyishly futile sort of way.

Had he not appeared himself to be disturbed by such matters, undoubtedly they would have passed from her mind at once. She was not of a suspicious nature, nor was her head accustomed to question her heart's judgment. She had not been out in the world of men long enough, nor had she elbowed it closely enough, to feel a hostile inquisitiveness toward her fellow creatures. A divine fairy god-

mother at her christening had given her the gift of seeing beauty, and she saw it everywhere. Even in her darkest moment, it had been pain that had beset her—pain and a sense of the futility of things—not a vision of sordidness or of the hideous cunning of hypocrisy and lust. And there are—who will readily deny it?—dignity and majesty and beauty in the pain that is apart from these, a pain that comes —must come—with the ceaseless struggle of the spirit to subdue and master the demands of the flesh.

So it was that when she unleashed her heart to follow its own will, it gave itself utterly, unquestioningly, with a completeness that needed a mighty proof—and not haphazard coincidences—to bring it to a pause in its headlong, passionately glad following of an ideal at last clothed in flesh!

The lesson that the fairy-loving heart of Katherine had need to learn was that there is no ideal which can be perfectly clothed in flesh; in the very transition from its own reality to the grosser medium of its expression there must be lost some of the power, the completeness of perfection. The real Charles Martin was all that, and more than, even she could discover and believe to be the prince of her dreams; but in his human effort to delineate himself accurately through the thirty years that he had

lived, what wonder if, occasionally, he had made false lines, wavering, unsure—which perhaps he had vainly tried to rub out as he saw more true? What a glory there is to be if, indeed:

"The Master alone shall praise us, and the Master alone shall blame."

And there will be found in erasures (that have fair worn holes in the stuff we draw upon!) evidence of our true self's divine dissatisfaction with what we have done! It is youth alone—strong, beautiful, intolerant human youth—that demands a sheet free from smudgings, innocent of tentative sketches that we have drawn in an effort to make our work a masterpiece! And Katherine Woods was young—and she loved, deeply, passionately, utterly, with an abandon that demanded all even as she gave all. Life is very hard sometimes for clear-visioned, uncompromising youth!

The day whose morning had held a dawn of a glorious future for Fairy-godmother's Prince and Princess whiled itself away in a rosy dream for both of them. Martin was finally forced into a whimsical apology to Carruthers for a gross neglect of duty—as he phrased it—an apology which was followed by a boyish hint of the true state of his

mind, and oddly enough brought forth the most enthusiastic jovialities from the elder man.

Katherine, after dawdling over her typewriter in a haze of delicious memories, finally ceased striving to bring her thrilling body into duteous service and wandered off to the park to sit upon the selfsame bench that had supported the anguished little person of a few weeks before. The robins sang, the earth was warm and sweet and lovely, and she was a princess indeed! What marvel that, woman-like, her thoughts ran on and she dreamed a tiny cottage in an inconspicuous suburb where birds might sing in a wee garden, as they did all about her there that day, and where, in a chintz-hung study, she might write wonderful love stories that were somehow more real to her now than the tragic themes of only a month ago? Always he was there—her man, her prince; sometimes swinging home to her through the dusk, sometimes sitting in the living room that she had already fancied walled with the books they both loved, the light resting upon his finely modelled head and shoulders. . . . He was reading aloud to her as she sewed—for she had a womanly love of dainty needlework. And he would storm, perhaps, with that delicious masterfulness as he once had—about her injuring her eyes with hemstitching——

Such a sudden catch in her throat and such a divine flush came over her lovely girlish face that a well-garbed, rather good-looking young male who was idly watching her as he sauntered along accepted it as a tribute to his personal attractiveness and, drawing near, spoke to her smilingly:

"Have you any objection if I sit on this bench, too?" He was not in the least a wicked young man—only a rather over-fatuous, self-confident one, and her gentle reply collapsed the bubble of his self-esteem more swiftly than a prudish ignoring of his remark would have done:

"Not in the least," she replied with a sweetly astonished aloofness, as she rose with the dignity of a true princess and swung blithely on her homeward way.

That evening Martin cancelled the engagement he had had to dine with Carruthers and rushed to the subway that should bear him to the dingy boarding-house. At least he would have a vision of his princess before Cricket carried her off to the absurdly emphasized "first row in the balcony. . . ." Confound Cricket, anyhow. . . . Well, only an infinitesimal time that he should have to endure that sort of thing viewed in the light of a long, glorious future of having her all to himself! Only two more days of keeping her in ignorance of his

real identity, for in three days Reeves was to return to assume his former position and Othello's occupation would be gone! Not quite, however, for Carruthers had wrung a half-way promise from him that he would act as a sort of consulting editor. They couldn't spare him entirely—couldn't go back to things without him after having had a taste of what he could do for them if he would.

Nothing that had ever happened to Martin in his business career had pleased him quite so much as this praise from Carruthers—for Carruthers was bluntly frank usually. . . . Two days! He planned to tell her of it on the evening of Memorial Day. They had an engagement for that evening; it was to be a little supper somewhere—Katherine did not know where but Martin did. Everybody would be out of the way by that time and he would be free to introduce her to some of his old haunts—not the tawdry glitter of lavish display which he had, with the soul of a gentleman, always loathed—but a certain softly lighted, oddly artistic little place sought out by beauty lovers like herself. It was there that he would reveal himself to her as the prince indeed—the prince who should give her all that stern life had hitherto denied of luxury and beauty and loving protection.

When he entered, he met Fairy-godmother, who was scampering down the stairs.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "we didn't know that you were coming home to dinner! I bet the peas won't go round. We just used what we had left from last night becuz Princess was going out to dinner with Mr. Gnome!" She paused, hesitating over her request. "Would you please go kind of easy on the peas? You see, Stepmother will blame me for telling her that you prob'ly wouldn't come."

He smiled down at her, patting the slim hand.

"I promise to go easy on the peas, Fairy-godmother; in fact, I'm really not one whit hungry." It was true. He suddenly felt as if he could not eat a mouthful of food at a table where a vacant chair—two vacant chairs, worse luck!—were staring him out of countenance and causing him to remember what he was missing and what Cricket—again confound him!—was lucky enough to be enjoying. An inspiration seized him as he glanced down at the wistful little face which seemed to understand his trouble; at least he could talk freely of his Princess to the only being in the world who understood.

"If Stepmother will let you," and he made up his mind that Stepmother would, if she had to be bribed, "will you come somewhere to dinner with me,

Fairy-godmother? And afterward, we'll go to see —er—something—I'll think about that during dinner—something that we should like."

Fairy-godmother drew a long breath of astonishment.

"Not *me* ?" she breathed in ecstasy.

"You, indeed, Fairy-godmother; who else?" Her delight gave him the guiltiest feeling that he had had in many a long day. Fairy godmothers who don't "need things for theirselves" are often forgotten. In affectionate favours and thoughtfulness, apparently, as in everything else, the demand must antedate the supply.

"Now run along and get ready and I'll see Stepmother and arrange it with her. Meet me here in, say, half an hour." He treated the matter with the importance that it deserved. Fairy godmother paused about halfway up the stairs in sudden consternation. She clasped her hands helplessly before her:

"I don't believe that I've a single thing to wear!"

She did not understand why her beloved prince fell weakly against the wall with the ejaculation:

"Oh, woman, woman!"

"Do you think that the dress I had on Sunday, and my squirrelling shoes, will do?"

"I'm sure of it, Fairy-godmother."

Such a night of ecstatic joy Fairy-godmother had never known in all her life, for the Stepmother was too diplomatic to resist the occupant of the second floor front which was "too expensive for anybody to rent."

The True Princess heard all about it. They had "lots of things and ice cream with the cunningest little cakes" at a place where there was "wonnerful musics," and where the waiter served her as if she had been a trooly-rooly grown-up lady. To tell the truth, the obsequious waiter who, taking his cue from Martin, treated her with a somewhat grandiloquent dignity, was her model from that time on in her serving at table. In the somewhat dour days that were destined to follow so soon, she unconsciously elicited a smile from the gravely silent Cricket more than once by a flourish of plates and the whisking of a napkin laid over her arm.

Martin realized that he could have discovered a no more nearly satisfactory way in which to while away an evening which was destined, in the nature of things, to be restless and abstracted. Fairy-godmother needed no formalities of entertainment. She revelled in her surroundings. It was as if some one had waved her own magic wand. It sur-

prised and pleased him to discover that her spontaneous delight was held duteously in leash of soft expression; and it amused him to note that her manner was an impeccable copy of her beloved Princess's.

Fortunately, a well-known and popular whimsical fantasy was playing at one of the theatres, and Comfort, who had never in her small life entered a playhouse, gazed with breathless wonder that left untouched no detail of beauty. Suddenly she gave a little start and responded with a friendly smile to the interested gaze of some one who was sitting not far away . . . a very lovely some one with red lips that parted smiling at the wonder-filled gray eyes. Comfort leaned over to Martin and whispered delightedly: "I 'most thought that pretty lady was the Princess; please look, quick!"

Martin smiled at the "pretty lady" as if he knew her rather well and, excusing himself with grave formality, he left Comfort and made his way toward her, swiftly effecting an exchange of seats with a benevolent elderly couple who sat next to her. As he and Comfort took their places, with the latter seated carefully next to her "pretty lady," Martin commented, by way of introduction:

"A most wonderful likeness has been discovered in you by my little Fairy-godmother, Mrs. Ogden; won't you let her tell you about it? I'm sure that no further introduction is necessary, for you, too, believe in fairies—else you would not be here."

"Perhaps," Mrs. Ogden laughed at him, slipping a soft, gloved hand over Comfort's, "perhaps I'm trying to bring back a former faith!"

"Then I have greater pleasure in presenting to you one who will give you all the needed proof and encouragement. Comfort, from now on you are to have Mrs. Ogden under your godmotherly wing."

Comfort smiled a shy little smile and asked quite seriously:

"Are you really and truly in earnest? I'd like to, if you mean it, because you are so very pretty, almost as pretty as the True Princess!"

Mrs. Ogden laughed with heightened colour.

"Thank you, dear," she said gently. "I am glad that you think that. I'm sure you would be a very cheery sort of person to know if one were downcast."

"She is," asseverated Martin; "and I will have you know that being placed next in degree to the Princess of our realm is a great honour. I'm tre-

mendously glad that you chanced to come to-night. The fairies must have planned this, too."

"At the last moment Miss Prudhomme deserted me—or at least cannot arrive until late in the performance—so I'm rather glad myself, you see. This is far better than Miss Prudhomme, for she doesn't believe in fairies. And now let me hear all about the Princess."

"I've been talking about her all evening," Comfort remarked with delighted candour. "Mr. Prince just loves to hear about her."

Comfort never understood why Mrs. Ogden laughed with such a spontaneous teasing gurgle—just like the Princess—or why the beloved prince seemed to join in her mirth a bit unwillingly.

"Mrs. Ogden knows of her by her 'sponsors-in-baptism' name, Fairy-godmother," he said as if indeed one must say something, "so she will be particularly interested in the story of the roseleaf, you know."

"Oh, do you?" Comfort was eager, and Mrs. Ogden raised her brows at Martin inquiringly.

"Our newest and most promising contributor, Katherine Woods," he said. "Perhaps you did not know that we all live at the fairy boarding-house?"

Mrs. Ogden shook her head and the soft, gloved

hands suddenly clenched in her lap—a small matter which neither Martin nor his little guest of the evening noted.

"O-oh!" she breathed very softly. "I'm sure that I shall want to hear—a great deal!" The house darkened and the curtain rose and they were in Fairyland.

"All about the princess" filled the interstices left in the discussion of the delights and probabilities of the fairy-play; and the powers of fairies in general in guiding the destinies of mortals. It was a very-much-interested Mrs. Ogden who asked all sorts of questions about the princess and a very-much-delighted fairy godmother who answered them all in explicit detail. Now and then Martin, in general rather abstracted and inclined to leave them to themselves, interposed an explanation about Fairy-godmother herself, and her relation to the destinies of the boarding-house. He explained, too, about Comfort's father of whom Mrs. Ogden seemed to know a great deal, and they exchanged glances occasionally which were full of a mutual understanding.

"Peeling, you know, is our regular job," he informed Mrs. Ogden on one of these occasions, "potatoes and cucumbers in season and—what else is peelable, Fairy-godmother?" he quizzed.

"Ongyuns, mos'ly," she confessed, ruefully, "and they do squizzle one's eyes so! The Princess taught me to say 'one's,'" she added proudly.

Perhaps it was the thought of the "ongyuns" that squizzled Mrs. Ogden's eyes, for—as the story of the Princess and the skylight room that let in the stars, and the pennies that tried to take the place of the skinny envelopes was told bit by bit—by interpolations on Martin's part and by inference as well as by phrase—there was a mistiness in her eyes and a choking in her throat. It was well that Miss Prudhomme slipped into her place just then and the conversation became quite formal. Martin, however, glimpsed the mistiness and his heart warmed to her suddenly. There was something about her, after all, not unlike the True Princess, albeit it had taken Fairy-godmother to disclose it to him.

"You were the first, Mr. Carruthers told me, to see promise in her," he said in a low tone that somehow held comfort, "so we shall make you her good fairy in chief." There was that in his eyes as he spoke of his Princess which made Mrs. Ogden's assurance upon one point doubly sure.

"That means more to me than you can ever know," she replied simply. "From to-night on I shall believe in fairies!"

Despite a really delightful sensation which accompanied the novel events of the evening, Martin felt that many more hours than his watch indicated had passed since that golden moment of the morning. Frankly he faced the true name of the feeling that welled up within him and made him click his teeth grimly as his wakeful listening in the dark of his room was rewarded by hearing a soft, low laugh respond to an inaudible sally of Cricket's.

After all, this custom in his own world of having a watchful dragon in attendance upon the unmarried who are seeking amusement together in public is an almighty good one! That was his wrathful decision as he thumped his pillow. How could he know that, starry-eyed in the dim-lit upper hall, his True Princess wafted a yearning good-night to him through the insensible door which vacantly faced her, and then fled almost guiltily up the second flight of stairs? And how could he know that Cricket was softly pacing the hall of the lower floor, with his fingernails cutting into his palms, telling himself that it was, of course, no more than he had known all along? The turn of phrase which had made her laugh softly as she left him there was Cricket's way of meeting his fate.

CHAPTER XVI

MARTIN awoke refreshed and gay, jubilant that only another thirty-six hours remained ere he could appear in his true character. He hastily flung his bath robe about him and lopped off to the so-called "private bath"—a rather unscientifically improvised attachment which seemed to lack structural unity with the rest of the house. As he defiantly hurled out bits of gay operas while the water whirred into the enamelled tin, he was thoughtfully cutting down the aforesaid period of thirty-six hours into twelve. Why not to-night? To-morrow, Memorial Day, was a holiday and would be a hodgepodge of plans—loud-voiced suggestions of outings and that sort of middle-class thing which got on his nerves. If only she knew before then, he might telephone Peters to have the big car meet them somewhere and they would slip away for a long, glorious drive through the country—the very thing he had been dreaming about. Think of it! With her at his side—voicing her delight in that delicious, impulsive, gurgling way she had! There was a pic-

turesque little place where they would have dinner—and then return in the early, fragrant dusk!

That settled it! He would tell her that night. No reason on earth why he should wait until fairly forced into it by his disappearance from the position of reader for Mr. Carruthers! Certainly not! He flung himself into the clothes which the impeccable Bland had placed for him the night before—so much indulgence in service Martin had allowed him—and raced downstairs.

There was between them that absurdly delicious formality which thrills with hidden understanding, and she swiftly acquiesced in the changed plan. Of course she knew nothing of the beautiful scheme for Memorial Day. It was to be told her that night, he reflected gleefully. Was it just possible that to her, too, a day in which they were not together seemed an interminable affair—a day which any calendar were foolish to acknowledge on an equal footing with days that stood out in their memories as red-letter days? What wonder if, for the first time, since his coming to the Prouty boarding-house, he demanded especial service from Bland that evening and grew really irritable once or twice when results did not meet his fastidious expectations?

In the case of the True Princess, Fairy-godmother was called into service, for her swift, slender fingers could manage hooks that seemed longing to jab into lacy folds which lured them; and it was her glowing tribute that sent the little writer of stories away from the skylight room as happy-hearted as Cinderella herself when she met the approval of the little old woman in the high hat.

"Oh, True Princess, you're the bewtifulest thing in the whole wide world!"

So the Prince thought as she came down the stairs, buttoning her white gloves, the bubbly hair crowned with a smartly simple broad-brimmed hat that deepened the shadows lurking about the softly luminous, childlike eyes.

The feeling of which Martin was most conscious, that evening, was pride in her—her delicate air of distinction, her gracious unconsciousness of all save himself, her quiet delight in the picturesque haunt that he had chosen for the setting of the great moment of his romance (as he liked to think it!), even the haughty little fashion of lifting her chin, and that aristocratic poise of her head that he had first noticed and named "birdlike." What a little thoroughbred she was—this girl born in the Southern rectory! Save for the richness of a new wonder

thrilling in her voice—the faltering of her eyes before his joyously ardent gaze—he might be no more to her than the merest acquaintance. Womanlike, she was divided between a longing to hear him say the words that she knew trembled on his tongue, and a desire to hold fast that delicious moment when they both knew—but not in mere phrases!

Every commonplace utterance in that new caressing tone of his vibrant voice thrilled her, each glance that she was brave enough to meet. They laughed at inconsequences and played at reading each other's thoughts in the fashion of lovers of every station the world over. How could he break this marvellous spell of love's weaving by telling her baldly who he was? What mattered it, indeed? What was a mere name compared to being her prince; inherited lands and stocks and bonds when viewed in the light of a fortune which he had won for himself? So madly sure he was that he possessed the golden treasure of her love that he played with his assurance, let it tease him with its blessed nearness. It is only those who half fear their fate who must put it to the test at once.

She glanced at the back of a man, who was passing their table à deux, talking so volubly to his companion that he did not see them. Martin fol-

lowed the direction of her gaze and smiled relievedly when he saw that they were not recognized.

"I seem to be haunted by my friend, Le Jeune," he smiled at her. "I'm glad not to be overpowered by his French again!"

She laughed. "But you seem to have known several people who dined here to-night."

"Bowing acquaintances only, thank Heaven!" he ejaculated piously. "I had no notion, however, that I should see any one I knew. I fancied that everybody was out of town by this time."

"Everybody?" she repeated, faintly puzzled.

"Oh—everybody that is anybody. . . . I beg your pardon! That's an inane phrase; I mean——"

"I understand perfectly," she smiled at him innocently. "You mean any one who has done things that matter—like M. Le Jeune, for instance."

"Er—yes," he agreed with mingled relief and chagrin. He was glad that he had told Carruthers that he was going to collect points of view. Jove! he needed it!

"I'm frightfully ignorant about M. Le Jeune," she confessed presently, adding in soft appeal: "Tell me, what has he done that I should know about?"

"Oh, odds and ends of things in landscape—he goes at things in a new way—is distinguished I suppose chiefly for his lightings. Personally I liked his 'Nocturne' best. It's a genuine little masterpiece." He laughed a little in unexplainable embarrassment as he added, "Somebody has bought it, I believe, for the Metropolitan and it has just been accepted. I'm mighty glad that it got through. Usually a fellow has to be dead a hundred years, you know, before he gets any recognition. Half a dozen old conservatives nearly swooned when 'Duggy' Volk made it as a reward of virtue—*sans patron*—and now somebody is boosting Le Jeune who hasn't the real stuff to do it unaided perhaps. I like Le Jeune and I admire his work. I can't see why these chaps who are likely to be awarded a place with the old timers can't have a few laurels while they are alive." The glance that he received gave him infinite satisfaction in his sentiments. They evidently stood approved as read.

"My French is wretchedly rusty but the other evening, when he spoke to you—he seemed to be thanking you?" There was the slightest rise in her voice to betoken the interrogation. He sent a swift look at her, but she was innocently interested.

"Yes, the French are so voluble and emotional,

you know—I merely used a little influence that I had."

"The power of the press in this day and age is remarkable," sighed the Princess with a proud glance that fluttered down as he met it quizzically.

"Indeed it is!" Martin was brief and heartily wished himself well out of this topic.

"Was it—a paper that you wrote in his behalf?" She so longed to know all that concerned him! She wanted little particularizations of his benevolent efforts to hug to her heart when he was not near!

"A paper? Er—yes—a paper"—a wicked gleam came into his eyes and he remembered the "skinny letters"—"in his behalf. Rather a longish paper—but not at all deep. Come to think of it, it was a bit narrow, too!" (What a good time he was having all by himself; with what glee they would shout about it afterward!)

"How absurd you are!" she smiled at him. "Sometimes you quite mystify me!"

"No more than you mystify me, True Princess," he said, leaning toward her as she rested her chin in a little pink palm and gazed at him with level eyes. (How narrow the tables were she suddenly realized rather breathlessly!) "Nor, I verily believe, half so much. That is the wonderful charm of you! I

think that you invoke fairy power at times—and it is not quite fair to a mere mortal!"

She laughed, low, deliciously. Then she suddenly became very grave and a shadow crept into the brown eyes that he loved.

"I do—invoke fairy power—sometimes," she admitted with whimsical wistfulness. "I have had to, for there was not any mortal to whom I could turn."

"Dear!" he exclaimed, softly, putting a hand over hers.

"But they helped me"—she drew it away swiftly with shining eyes—"most 'wonnerfully' as Fairy-godmother says."

"Tell me," he demanded in a tone that was very masterful indeed.

"But you won't feel sorry for me—or pity me?" He smiled at her question and, with a little gesture, refused to be bound. "But you really must not," she protested, "for it is all over, long ago—so long ago that it does not seem as if it were my own self who felt—that way."

"What way, Princess?" How gravely protecting he was!

So she told him—there in the wonderfully artistic, romantic setting he had chosen for his own con-

fession—the drab little story of her despair, her inability to meet life on any sort of terms, and its almost tragic ending with the little white box in her pocket. His own face was haggard and gray when she finished.

"So you see it wasn't the fairy gold—for that's what I have named my gift—but the squirrel they sent to be friendly which made up my mind to be brave. I've always been glad to think that. I should rather think that the fairies rewarded—than bribed!"

"Thank God!" he ejaculated, softly and with the nearest approach to grateful prayer that he had ever known: "thank God for fairies!"

"And you see," she went on with a mistiness that sprang from gratitude as deep as his that the wonder of her life had been willed to go on—"they did not stop working at all with that! It was fairies who made Mr. Carruthers send for my story which had been sent back by mistake."

"Thank God!" Martin ejaculated again, "for Fairy-godmother!"

Katherine looked at him uncomprehendingly, yet she did not care to understand; she was too happy with the things that she knew. Yet, afterward, the phrase returned to her with a bitterness that she did not now realize could exist.

"Don't think me mercenary"—he smiled at her warning—"because I said that the check made my life over."

"I will not," he promised solemnly.

"It wasn't just money. I loathe people who think that money means all that there is—and can buy everything," a hard line crept into her lips, "but it seemed good to be—free to live. I—I think, too, that the experience was good for me, for I have always, in my heart, felt a contempt—unacknowledged, of course—for one very dear to me . . . because she could not face things."

This, then, was her sad little mystery! He hated himself for the faint relief that he felt. He waited for her to continue if she would, but she closed her confession resolutely at this point with a smile: "I have learned my little lesson and I'm willing now to wait for things to be made plain. I feel sure that some time even the identity of the sender of the fairy gold will be discovered. The fairies will whisper the secret when they want me to know!"

"Why did I never know there were women like you in the world?" his glance worshipped her openly —and turned her mood.

"Perhaps there aren't," she murmured, turning her eyes away from him. "I don't come—in sets!"

He laughed in enjoyment of her absurdity. She was Fairy-godmother grown up! One could never be sure what mood would meet him!

"I'm not altruist enough to be sorry," he murmured; then he paused, diffident suddenly as any schoolboy.

How he wanted to tell her all about it, and there were a hundred pretty ways which might follow that auspicious opening! The stage was set as he had wanted it, the music and the lights enmeshed them in romantic glamour, it was his cue indubitably; but the moment had gone and the waiter refilled his glass—most solicitously. Confound waiters!

Womanlike she took an unmerciful advantage of him, divining the turbulent state of his mind. Laughingly she evaded every serious issue, teasingly parried each dear home thrust, and altogether flouted the conventionally complimentary inanities which he exasperated himself by saying. Was he really, after all, the masterful Charles Martin into whose hands without effort everything that he wished for had fallen ever since he could remember? The minx that she was! She was laughing at him—not in the coquettish, arch fashion of a *débutante*, or the more artfully luring way of one who was practised in the wiles of his realm, but with gurgling, really amused,

infectiously frank laughter in which he joined quite helplessly.

It was with a sigh of regret, and a sense of disappointment in circumstances over which he seemed to have no control, however, that he found himself fitting the key into Mrs. Prouty's latch—but, after all, to-morrow, in his own car, with faithful Peters again in front of him—by Jove! he would be mighty glad to see Peters! He had a wistful sort of longing now for Martindale—Martindale with Katherine, for without her the world itself would seem uninhabited.

Yes, he was glad, after all, that he had waited to tell her until a suggestion, at least, of his own world was about him. The adventure had lost a bit of its novelty—and he had discovered that it was merely his characteristic adaptability and not a real fondness for middle-class life that had made him fit in so well at Mrs. Prouty's. He was undoubtedly a snob—let it be admitted fairly—but the memory of the meadowsweet fragrance of the long library at Martindale assailed him as the opening of the door into Mrs. Prouty's low-lighted hall whiffed into his nostrils a faint odour of diligently cooked vegetables.

He looked back at Katherine, standing without in

the moonlight, breathing in with deep delight the beauty and wonder of night. She did not know that it was hopelessly middle-class; one could tell it in the childlike parting of her lips as she lifted her eyes to the stars. To her—it came to him swiftly as a revelation—love had touched everything with magic wand. She turned to him with shining eyes and gestured farewell to the night with a little white-gloved hand.

"So ends the most beautiful day in my life!" she said—but the sigh was of content not regret.

"Was it really the most beautiful day?" he asked softly. How dear and sweet she was, framed there in the doorway!

"So far; but all days are beautiful now," she said blissfully. "The only thing that ever makes me sad is that all people are not so happy as I. I know that I have enough happiness to spare, heaps and heaps!"

"The roseleaf!" he smiled down at her. "The tiny roseleaf that others, given the heaps and heaps of cushions for their soft couches, never notice! You are the True Princess; Fairy-godmother was quite right about it."

"Fairy-godmother is an absurdly prejudiced dear!"

"Then I am an absurdly prejudiced dear. *Q.E.D.*"

"You are absurdly prejudiced!"

"You will go no further?" There was, in the background of his consciousness, a hypercritical self that struggled vainly to conquer the fatuously-in-love person—the hypercritical self that realized the commonplaceness of it all and could distinguish every separate odour that floated out into the night.

"I'm going quite to the top floor," she told him—the self of him that saw her there in the faint, dim glow of the light in the boarding-house hall and forgot all about stage settings, and graceful phrasings—"to the little skylight room where I shall look out at the stars and thank the fairies for making me the happiest person in the whole world! I never dreamed that even fairies could make the world so different in only a few weeks!"

Martin held fast the hand that she offered him in good-night.

"You don't think, do you, that possibly—'possissibly,' as Fairy-godmother says"—[they had suddenly changed rôles and he was smilingly tyrannical as he felt her hand tremble in vain effort to withdraw]—"that the world seems different to you because you love—love with all that dear golden heart of you?"

"Of course"—she was now utterly miserable for

he had possessed himself of her other hand and she was stubbornly staring at the hideous pattern of the wall paper in order not to meet his eyes—"of course one can't help loving—everybody—when all the world is so kind—little Fairy-godmother and you especially."

"I refuse to be included in any such broad Christian charity," he declared definitely. "I want the whole of that heart, and I'll sublet pieces of it if necessary. . . ." A tremble of her lips silenced him and all contrition he drew the now-unresisting little figure close into his arms. "Oh, beloved little True Princess," he whispered, "forgive me! I have hurt your happiest day! And I love you so, dearest—need you so to share with me my kingdom! I—oh, I never expected to make such a mess of asking a woman to marry me! I should not blame you, little Princess, if you refused to listen to me; but hang it, I—can't let the day end—can't let you go from me again without knowing how I love you. The mere thought of losing you out of my life fills me with a dread that I cannot face! A house, with a lot of rooms, and to know that you will never be in them! With doorways that hold no promise of you smiling and expectant on the threshold—lovelight in your eyes. . . . Yes . . . lovelight"—he bent

his head very close, his lips almost brushed hers—"that I've seen there—perhaps when I've come in after a weary day's work" (how sweet it was to say it!) "to find you waiting for me! For you *were* waiting for me, Katherine—sweetheart girl! Don't deny it!"

Laughing, in woman fashion, with a sobbing little catch in the laugh, she clung to him. "I'm not denying it, dear, big lad; I'm—I'm proud of it! I've been waiting for you—always!" It was the merest whisper and the last word blurred upon his lips.

There was a frightened little gasp—it was the only sound which had broken the silence in long minutes—and they flew apart in time to catch a glimpse of a little barefooted figure fairly scampering up from midway on the stairs, a skimpy-skirted little garment somewhat impeding swiftness of progress.

"Please 'scuse me," the soft whisper floated down to them: "I hadn't a mite of a hunch that anybody was there! I was coming down to put out the light 'cause I thought you'd forgot it—and Stepmother'd give you the dickuns in the morning."

"I'll turn it out, Fairy-godmother," whispered Martin, boyishly flushed and laughing, for the spell

was broken and at the sound of Fairy-godmother's whisper, his princess had fled from him and vanished up the stairway. His eyes pierced the darkness, his ears were attent—but she was gone. It was as if a door had closed upon his dreams and all about was shabby and commonplace and dull—yet the thrill was there—and there were only a few short hours until to-morrow—hours in which he could dream of her, and plan a wonderful future.

He lifted his hand to turn the light off, and a sparkling object at the foot of the stairs caught his eye. He picked it up and lifted it to his lips.

It was the little silver buckle, set in brilliants, that had adorned the slipper of his princess!

CHAPTER XVII

TO UNDERSTAND John Carruthers—and John Carruthers was worth understanding—one should know a bit about his struggles to attain the particular rung of the ladder upon which he was discovered at the time when his junior co-temporary in college called him over the telephone and asked him to buy Miss Katherine Woods's stories.

College for Martin had been the natural sequence of strenuous days with a conscientious tutor—a genuine scholar whose breadth of learning and depth of knowledge had been a fertile field in which the naturally apt mind of his pupil had grown apace. So thorough indeed had been the preparation of the young prince of finance that his college days were those earlier callow seasons when the young mind and heart must have its devotions and heroes. Such a hero was Carruthers, to Martin—Carruthers who was his senior by five years because of the necessity for accumulating the sum required ere he could effect his entrance into the institution that he had fought

hard to make his Alma Mater. Carruthers had only two more years when Martin entered, but, by some freak of fate, they were thrown together and friendship between two such men, to each of whom the other seemed to lead the life desirable, was the natural outcome. Martin, singularly unspoiled by the gifts of the gods at his christening, was to Carruthers enviable because he had, without a turn of the hand, all those things for which the older man had worked long and unceasingly. To Martin, however, Carruthers's distinctions, bought with the price of his own labour or come to him through a genuine appreciation of superior merit, were considered with envious reverence.

"What you have, you have, Jack," Martin had said once to him in the old days when, with pipes and books, they sat making over the universe. "It's yours by inalienable right of services rendered; but distinction gained by inherited money—that's an accident. It might be something that the cat brought in."

"Not a very respectful name for your honoured forbears," grinned Carruthers—all of which has really nothing to do with this present story of them, save that it serves to show the fact of the more or less unchangeableness of personalities.

Carruthers was Carruthers the editor then—less grim, perhaps—less taciturn and indifferent to the affections of his fellow men and women—with a smile a whit more eager as a social favour was extended to him—but after all, the Carruthers whose single-hearted purpose was to win a place for himself by clean-cut, honourable methods—"make himself count," as he had phrased it. Even if, at the not-too-advanced age of thirty-five, he had come to the realization that he had missed much of the beauty and joy of living in his almost morose singleness of purpose, he was assuredly not regretful over his career in general. He would have balanced all carefully and would have made, again, exactly the same choice at each crossroad.

He had few close friends among men, for few knew him well enough to count him as such—but those few he had bound with the traditionally accepted hoops of steel: he had a wide, shallow acquaintance among women, for to them his inscrutability was an added charm, but he treated them all with a laughing, fatherly chivalry—if such is not a contradiction of terms—and promptly forgot all about them the minute that he entered his sanctum. Only one near of kin there was—a younger sister whom he had adored since babyhood and protected from any

knowledge of the hurts of struggle. That delightful task, however, he had delegated to a young business man of Chicago, some three years since, and the bright spots in his life were the occasional visits to their comfortable home—visits spent chiefly on the floor as a doggie for his namesake.

It had been on one of these visits a little over a year before that his brother-in-law, a fine-natured, big-hearted young fellow, had spoken to him of a young woman who had applied for a position as stenographer in answer to an advertisement which he had inserted. She was a business college graduate—not experienced—and he had had to turn her away; but he had kept her name and address.

"I can't get her off my mind, Jack," he had said with a worried air that evening; "I think she's had a desperately hard time, though of course she would not confess it. She's little and fragile—husband died suddenly, she told me and—Lord! I couldn't help thinking 'suppose Bettykins were thrown on her own resources in that fashion!' . . . I imagine you could use her somewhere." This, with the accompanying pitiful expression in the sympathetic eyes of the Betty-sister, was the reason that Mrs. Ogden found herself in the offices of a very well-known and popular magazine.

Once he had established her there, however, Carruthers treated her exactly as he treated every other woman whom he knew either in a social way or in an editorial capacity: with unfailing courtesy when she was near; and when she was not, he promptly forgot all about her existence.

It was not until Mrs. Ogden had swiftly and with ill-concealed pleasure accepted Martin's recognition of her gentlewomanhood that Carruthers—to put it bluntly—woke up.

Here was a woman who had worked with him for a year in whom Martin—so fastidious as to be almost a hypercritic of the modern woman—was finding interesting beauties of character as well as—oh, of course she had good eyes, honest and limpid as a child's yet with a depth of fire in them. He had noticed that—vaguely—himself.

It was with the faintest possible puckering of the brows that Betty Ames read her brother's latest letter—the pucker developing into a little worried line and voicing itself to her serene husband across the dinner table:

"Jack says that he has been to call upon that Mrs. Ogden, and has had her and her little boy out to ride in the car once or twice with a Miss Somebody-or-other who lives with the Ogdens."

"'Snice!" observed Husband, cheerfully attacking his salad.

"Ye-es"—doubtfully—"but don't you see . . . Jack's the fine, chivalrous sort. I wonder," she paused, looking across at him thoughtfully, "whether we did just right in getting him to take her down there."

Husband laid down his fork and expostulated whimsically:

"Lord, Bets, don't start worrying over Mrs. Ogden! She is not a siren. She is a lady beyond question. What if he does take an interest in her? What—horrible thought!—if it should be more than a passing interest? Maybe the Miss Somebody-or-other who lives with 'em is the most radiant enchantress that Manhattan has gazed upon! Perhaps she has her net set for Jack. Why, there are ramifications without end to that source of worry!" He laughed at her in the way that husbands have, the world over . . . and she pouted with the shamefaced air of one caught in an accustomed trap.

"That tin-god brother of yours will undoubtedly marry one of these days, and you have already worried your head off about forty-nine of his marriages, so it ought to be easy when it comes."

Perhaps even this husbandly comment would not

have kept the heart of sister Betty from anguished forebodings, however, could she have known that at the very time when Katherine Woods was telling the sorry story of the white box to Martin in the softly shimmering nook which ensconced their table, John Carruthers was seated beside Mrs. Ogden in his little car. It was the first time that he had taken her out alone.

He had that afternoon come to a decision as swift and definite and inviolable as his decisions usually were. He was going to ask Mrs. Ogden to marry him. It sounded cold-blooded, and Carruthers fancied that it was. That is, he felt that he had come to the decision in a becomingly judicial frame of mind. He knew that she interested him as no other woman had ever done; knew that he looked forward to the hours at which he might—by merely stretching forth a hand to press an electric button—see her appear upon the threshold of his office. He acknowledged to himself, too, that he counted as still more dear those swift-sped occasions upon which he watched her as a mother with her boy. It was this that appealed to him most strongly. The women that Carruthers knew were not maternal. The opportunity to assure himself of this wondrous side to her defiantly indifferent little self almost balanced, in Carruthers's

mind, the realization that some other man—now dead—had first won her heart—and the right to call her "wife."

What could he have been like—this other man? She had never spoken of him. He did not even know his given name. David had been named for her father, she had told him. When he found himself maundering in his thoughts about her, he rigorously pulled himself up short.

Yet he had come to his decision not without many a thoughtful pull at his pipe as he sat in his rooms in the big leather chair, magazines piled about him, or as alone, at one of his clubs, he dawdled over his dinner. No one would have suspected the real truth about Carruthers: he was essentially a home-loving man and cordially detested the way he lived. Yet he knew—none better—that with him marriage would be either a constantly growing wonder of experience or an inescapable tragedy. He could not play at his love life as men of his acquaintance did. It must be the bolt that locked together the perfectly fitting parts of his orderly existence. It must be for him, as for few other men he knew, the One Woman. It was for Her that he had waited with characteristic patience, confident of his success in the end.

He knew now that She had come to him. It was this quiet assurance which had deceived him into thinking that it was done in cool blood. He had faced the situation clearly, without pettifogging. There had been women of his acquaintance who had momentarily appealed to different aspects of what he was pleased to call "himself," but it had been single aspects merely to which they appealed. They left the whole man—that odd interweaving of flesh and mind and spirit found in each one of human creatures—indifferent.

Ambitious marriages he smiled at; mental marriages he sighed over; and infatuation he put out of his thoughts as a preposterous impossibility. Imagine a steady diet of champagne! He considered the women he had met quite apart always from their accidental environment. He knew that fishwives and Vere de Veres were to be discovered in limousines richly upholstered—exactly as fishwives and Vere de Veres were to be found in subway trains at the stuffy rush hours; and for this human knowledge men called him cynical and women inscrutable. It was little Mrs. Ogden who, herself far more cynical and inscrutable, went straight to the great heart of him and loved him for what she found there.

She had, it is true, evinced an air of defiance which

had disturbed him, but there was little of that to be encountered now. She was infinitely sweeter, he thought—and he wondered if Martin had anything to do with it. The "Prince" notion was an original one, surely—yet he would be glad when the masquerade was over. It might bring some sort of disaster in its train. In any event, it was rather a shabby trick to put over upon the office.

Although he scarcely acknowledged it to himself (and he was very honest), he wished to put his fate to the test before Prince became Martin again. Mrs. Ogden and the new assistant had been working together rather constantly—Martin had insisted on Carruthers extending her responsibility—and he was accustomed to call upon her no end for her opinions. Martin was a fascinating chap, and all of his life had won the love of men and women with a comradely smile or softly cadenced word.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. OGDEN nestled down in the car with a contented little breath, and after an exchange of conventional nothings, they glided along in silence. Once or twice she glanced covertly at his finely thoughtful face set straight ahead. The somewhat ironic corners of his strong mouth had grown softly smiling, and his irregular features were cut cameo-like against the shadowy rows of houses. They had crossed the heart of the city before he spoke. It was when they were passing a sinister battalion lined up grimly toeing the line of walk in the sixties:

"Prince is staying somewhere along here, I believe." She glanced about indifferently.

"A man probably does not mind it," she said, "but this sort of thing is unhomelike to a woman."

"A man does mind it," he stated briefly, and then they whirred into Broadway and went over Seventy-third past a brilliantly lighted hostelry at whose *porte-cochère* a huge motor was receiving an exotically garbed, expressionlessly mirthful group into its capacious tonneau.

"Show girls, probably," commented Carruthers as they dashed by out of sound of the laughter. There was the faintest suggestion of contempt in his tone and she flashed a look at him.

"Not at this time in the evening—think you?" she smiled.

"True, of course, if they are playing," he acknowledged. "You're tremendously swift to make deductions, aren't you?" he added with a sidelong smile at her.

"It was a natural remark," she said simply; then, with deliberation: "I was on the stage once myself, you know."

"No, I didn't know." His tone was casual. There was not even the twitch of an eyelid. A swift sense of relief that she could not but acknowledge swept over her. The thing was absolutely a matter of indifference to him! But of course he might not even take enough interest to . . . Her thought was unfinished. He spoke again; nodding at the Schwab residence.

"You consider Prince's present abiding place unhomelike; do you think that this sort of thing necessarily indicates a more secure happiness?"

"Oh, no!" she cried—and the passion of the utterance quite surprised him; "Oh, no, no!" The

iteration brought his eyes swiftly around to the blazing little face. He laughed and there was triumph in the tone of it. He suddenly felt very sure indeed.

"In which sentiment the kindly gentleman whose residence it is quite agrees with you," he commented, smiling. "I discover that we shall have to choose the simple life." He turned a glance to the shadowy river before he added very quietly, "For you know I am going to marry you, Mrs. Ogden."

A white, ungloved hand went to her throat and she did not reply. He could feel her trembling against him, but after a quick breath she held herself rigidly away. They were moving rather slowly along the upper Drive—the purr of the motor was even and monotonous, and he was still absorbed in the road in front of them. He had spoken and was glad. It was the sort of thing which, in a story, his pencil would have questioned unerringly for he knew that the public has a longing for romance; for the beauty and rapture of love scenes. Yet to him nothing else was possible; he had made the simple statement of a man who had never asked for anything in his life but had always got what he wanted. There was nothing more for him to do. He waited.

Her hands were clenched in her lap and she was

gazing straight ahead, or, if one used the inner vision, straight backward. Twice she essayed to speak before the words would come:

"I cannot—let you!" There was much in the tone of the almost inaudible sentence that he did not understand, but one thing came to him limpidly clear: it was of him that she was thinking—not herself.

His heart leaped. How swiftly he could put aside every scruple, whatever it might be! If she had read the thought, she would have yearned over him the more for she knew the big man at her side better than he knew himself. What a boy he was and how little he suspected all that a swift acquiescence on her part might bring upon him! How unfair to take advantage of that seeming masterfulness as she longed to do! His thought countered hers: How little she was, and young, and what a brute he had been to launch a tremendous sentence for life upon her!

"Of course you're telling me at once why you're not letting me?" The tone quizzed her playfully as if she had been a beloved child.

She was silent and her hands gripped each other the more tightly. Why—why had the half gods come to her only to shut out the gods when they arrived? She had been true to herself then—the young, in-

experienced self that she knew—and yet the shadow of that truth must stain her life! They whirred on in silence for long minutes; there were fewer motors sounding about them. Beneficent moments of stillness came to blend with the harmony of the night sounds—a grateful chiaroscuro given them by the blurring roar they had left behind.

"I am listening attentively," he murmured. He had made no move as if to touch her and she loved him the more for it. A passionate wish to resist him to the full, to raise the barrier once and for all so high that not even his chivalry could scale it took possession of her. He must shut her out of his thoughts as well as his life. Her heart held unvoiced a wild cry against the injustice of it to them both.

"Mr. Carruthers," she spoke tonelessly as if the soul within her were too weary to colour the musical voice, "our name is not Ogden—little David's and mine—we have no—legal name."

The car suddenly leaped into speed and Carruthers bent over the wheel. It was mad the way he drove. He seemed blind with the pain of it! His wrists were iron and cold as ice but the rest of his body burned and throbbed mercilessly. On they went, faster and faster; the car seemed bounding through

space somehow. She was glad with the rush of the wind—glad, glad even that death threatened them at any minute. . . . Then, as suddenly, he closed down; the wild, powerful thing was not running away with him after all; he was master of himself once more. She glanced at him, and his face, in the faint light, looked haggard and old. In that swift spasm of life John Carruthers had faced a big thing and yet knew that love was greater.

She glanced at him and her heart went out to him. So had she felt often when she was punishing little David. It was herself that she was hurting more cruelly in his anguish of not understanding why this should come to him.

Why had she made it so irrevocably hard? Any other test, she knew, the man courage of him and his love could endure. Moreover, her words had carried an implication untrue in its essence—a thought that she shuddered at even as she had spoken them—but she would have it so. Her life's experience with love had made her desire fairly to flaunt the bitterness of the cost to him—to put herself beyond even the pale of his chivalry. He must realize that she was out of his life—irrevocably. She almost laughed in the intensity of her pain. He—proud, ambitious, reserved John Carruthers—

would some day look back at this moment with horror at the nearness of the abyss into which he had all but flung his honourable, distinguished self!

His silence almost made her hysterical. If he did not speak soon she would scream! Her own words kept ringing in her ears: "we have no legal name—we have no legal name." Oh, it was too horrible! She had thought, two years before, that she had tasted the utter dregs of bitterness and humiliation—but she knew now that her cruelest hour had come. She saw herself with the eyes of the man she loved—those clean man's eyes that she had seen filled with a worship of her womanhood. Why had she twisted the truth into the most hideous shape she could find? . . . Why didn't they go faster—faster? They were creeping along now! She put out her hand vaguely as if she would control—and he lifted the icy little palm to his lips.

"Poor little girl," he said softly, "poor, plucky little girl—to keep on alone after the dream was ended! We'll make it up to David somehow, dear!"

At the swift revulsion of mood she broke into wild, soft sobbing and crouched down against him. He let her have the relief it afforded her; it was best so, he thought. Finally the wracking of her little

body grew less and her breathing had only a catch in it now and then. . . . She raised tear-wet eyes to his.

"Oh, my dearest," she whispered brokenly, "I didn't know that there could be men—like you!"

And then with wonderful woman's tenderness she eased the barb that pressed into him despite his magnificent dismissal of the pain. Bit by bit she told him things as they were, and she felt the muscles of his body relax and his breath come evenly. (Yet he had stood the greatest test, and all of her life she would remember—though they might be far apart!) The laddy's coming to earth had been after her youthful marriage had been annulled by reason of family pride; she had had no means, and no wish indeed, to fight for his name and sonship rights. She had determined that he should never open his eyes upon a world so hard, into which he would come questioned and unwelcome if not actually disgraced. It was with this purpose—and he understood its dour tenor—that she had cut herself off from all and left a message for those to whom she had brought disgrace—that it was ended. Her words held no complaint—no blame—but shafts of light were in the eyes of John Carruthers as he listened. His hand gripped the wheel vise-like.

"Are they—your own—living still?" he queried softly.

"Only one. She is the really plucky one—not I. If I had known all that I do now, I should not have left her alone—but one cannot know. One must do as seems best at the time. But now—I cannot see my way clear!"

He started to speak. "No," she whispered. "No, don't tell me. I must think it out for myself about her—and you. Oh, my dear—I must not let you hurt yourself. I shall not even see you until I have decided—what is best. Please—don't touch me! I can think things out more clearly—without that. I must not have it—even to remember!" He drew a long breath and they fell into silence that lasted—save for a few soft-spoken syllables about commonplace things—until he put her out at the door of the apartment building which swallowed her up in its depths.

CHAPTER XIX

THE plans for the Memorial Day outings were, as Martin had anticipated, rather stridently fixed at the breakfast table—yet a wonderful joyous peace pervaded his being. To-day, with its warm glory of sunshine, was to be the most wonderful day in his life, but he could wait for its wonder to unfold gradually. Martin had the anticipatory patience of the epicure.

He and Katherine had exchanged the merest formalities of greeting, after which she devoted herself to Cricket while Martin cheerfully discussed with Miss Prouty the possibilities of being able to get returning trains from this or that place on account of crowds. He advised this amusement park's advantages over that—matters of which in reality he knew but little (that fact, however, deterring him no whit). All the while he was acutely conscious of each turn of the brown head opposite him, each tone of soft-voiced bantering, and the blissful content of the musical laugh. Cricket had planned on Wash-

ington, so that they two alone were rather vaguely advancing slight holiday suggestions. Katherine pleaded several hours' work to be done, and Martin was taking Fairy-godmother to see a "p'rade" somewhere. He had commissioned Bland to communicate with Peters about the car. So do mice and men plan.

Miss Vincent buttonholed Katherine as she was desperately trying to avoid a tête-à-tête with Martin by making her escape early, ere the others had rushed away keen upon the scent of pleasure for the day; and as the talkative person "in the hardware" was pausing in her penultimate conclusion that crowds on holidays were miserably managed, Martin joined them. Miss Vincent withdrew with obtrusive tact, and Katherine, the vanquished, smiled at him rosily.

"Don't keep that brain of yours grinding out stories all morning," he admonished her with a new masterfulness. "I want at least half a girl left this afternoon to carry out our sealed orders." Katherine acknowledged this new right with a swift, shy little smile as Fairy-godmother appeared on the threshold.

"I was just coming to clear off the table," she remarked, hesitating. "You were finished break-

fast, weren't you? Because if you were not, there's no rush. The p'rade begins early, though, doesn't it?" anxiously.

"Oh, my, yes!" Martin imitated with a blithe recklessness. "Let me help you. Shall I scrape plates?" He suited the action to the word, and Comfort glanced at him with a worried air as a spatter of jam flung itself upon the cloth.

"I think, if you don't mind," she murmured politely, "I'd better do it myself. Of course men can't help being a little messy. The postman's in the next block, True Princess. I wasn't for sure that he would come to-day." (Comfort's idioms were an oddly assorted lot!)

"Ye-es, I was waiting for him." It is a royal privilege to be vague at times.

As Comfort trotted out with plates, cups, and saucers, she chatted gayly to them, her musical, childish voice shrieking the syllables distinctly as she clattered the dishes into the sink.

"'Scuse me for hollering," she remarked as she appeared again for another instalment, "but when the water's running I have to—and I always like sousing my dishes first."

"There is nothing," observed Martin gravely, "that makes for efficiency like sousing a dish."

Comfort had rushed to the window and was eagerly running through the pile of letters that the postman handed her.

"Hooray! 'Nother skinny!" she shouted, presenting it with a vast flourish, her interest in the other mail quite lost. With a smile Katherine opened it, and the smile deepened as she read. She turned it over to Martin with a delighted air. "See how famous you have made me! It is a splendid offer for an old story that I made over under your tutelage."

"I am glad that my help meant anything to you," he said, glancing it through interestedly. "That's really fine, you know. But 'never shake thy gory locks at me; thou canst not say I did it,'" he quoted at her—with an arrangement of his own. "We have not published a thing of yours yet. Your début comes next month."

"It isn't that. I'm writing now about happy things, and about the things that I know."

"It is an almost infallible rule for success in literature of to-day, dear," he added as Comfort disappeared, "and from now on all the things that you know are going to be happy things." His tone became tremendously practical as the child returned. "The last story that you sent us, for example; we all liked it mightily. Yet, oddly enough, it was

the same theme as that which Carruthers had refused—treated differently—happily—that's all."

She looked at him in amaze. Surely he could not mean. . . .

"Refused it?" she repeated slowly. "Why, he didn't refuse it—he accepted it! That was my first one—my turning point." Martin could have sworn at himself with a good grace.

"Oh, of course—I mean the one he refused at first. I used that term simply to identify the story. The title slipped my mind."

Katherine was satisfied, he noted with a sigh of relief.

"Yes," she admitted, and there was a shadow in the eyes that had been softly glowing, "it was the same theme—treated happily. I followed your suggestion, you see."

"And the result is," Martin covered his late embarrassment by great enthusiasm, "you have a corking little love story in the last, whereas the first was a tragedy."

She was silent, and her eyes were far away. He went on easily as Comfort moved about the table gathering up napkins.

"The world does not love tragedies, you know, and it is not really necessary to inflict gloom upon it.

Your last was delightful, just the sort of thing that people love to read: wealthy young fellow marries a poor girl and though his family make objections at first—necessary to the plot, of course, to interpose obstacles—she finally reconciles the snobbish old aristocrats to her charming self because she is so really fine, so genuinely womanly and sweet. Now that is natural, yet a pure romance; it is just the sort of thing that might happen any day, and the sort that people like to think happens every day."

Comfort scented a story and crept up close to them, nestling against Martin who put his arm about her and included her in their group.

"But the other——" He paused, thinking deeply. How could he tell her, after all? It was not entirely the theme, though he might make it appear so; it was the utter lack of selection, the almost hysterical neglect of unity, the—— He plunged into it none the less:

"Now the other was——" He paused, floundering about for a euphemism.

"Hopelessly unnatural?" Smiling oddly she gave him a phrase that he snatched eagerly.

"That's it—quite hopelessly." He was baffled by the quizzical wistfulness of her direct gaze. "I was wondering, dear—Miss Woods—how to make it

clear to you. The same theme—practically the identical characters under different names and slightly different environment: wealthy young man —poor girl; she was an actress, was she not?"

"Yes," softly, "an actress. Not a well-known one—just a bit of a beginner."

"There you are at the outset!" triumphantly. "What do you know about the stage? You have never even been behind the scenes, have you?"

"No."

Comfort was glancing from one to the other of her adored, rather wondering what it all meant. It was not a very interesting story to say the least. She hoped that it was going to have fairies soon.

"'Of course not; very well then,' as the comedian says," he replied, smiling. "Better not to write about it, little Princess. You see, you don't know the types. You have your stage girl high principled, and as sensitive as if she had never appeared in any stronger light than the lamp in the sitting room at home."

"Such a thing is possible."

He shrugged. "But not probable—and even romance must deal with the probable. Fiction has its conventions, you know." He seemed to be hurting her more than he thought he could by a mere

criticism. He wanted to get it over with so he hurried on:

"This time, after the young man marries the girl and his father interferes——"

"Annuls the marriage," she interposed.

"—Annuls the marriage, the boy deserts the beautiful and remarkably virtuous young actress who, discovering that their child" (he paused suddenly and repeated the word softly) "their child—— Somehow I'm beginning to see that story differently as I outline it! Perhaps it might not be so bad if it were worked over." He took up the thread of it as if to himself, " . . . their child is to have an unhappy environment and live pointed out as fatherless and without right even to name—I begin to see the thing now. But my dear girl, don't—don't have your beautiful heroine commit suicide! She absolutely must not kill herself; it's not done in fiction any more!"

Comfort gave a hurt little sob and slipped away from him. "Oh!" she cried, looking at her True Princess with her first reproach. "Oh—don't let her die! Make the bad ones change into some'n turrible!"

Martin smiled. "That's a fair representation of the attitude of the dear public," he said; "and more

than that, in this case the tragedy is fairly forced down our throats. It was useless. It was not even logical or plausible." (He might as well out with it!)

"Com-fort!" a loud but languid voice floated down the stairs, "bring me up the dust pan, and take the morning paper to Miss Woods. I'm through with it."

"Make 'em change to hippopotamuses," suggested Comfort, dashing off; "they're homely as the dickuns." Martin chuckled, and in his amusement quite lost the subject matter under discussion. In fact, there were many things more vital to him that day than stories of love's dream. To him this morning the dream was the thing.

"Are you sure?" The girl's voice brought him back with a start to the matter in hand.

"Quite. Well-bred men are not going to be cowards, as was this young husband—or brutes, as the director of family destinies was—even though they have wealth." He added the latter phrase whimsically with a mischievous glance at her. "My dear little girl, why always so hard on those afflicted by the accident of means? It is not their fault—in many cases—any more than it is the fault of others that they are poor. It is an outward condition with temptations, and opportunities of failure quite as

numerous as—if not more so than—those of poverty. One would think that you had had sad experiences with the rich, little Princess girl!" He lifted two rosy-tipped fingers surreptitiously to his lips.

"Perhaps I have." There was a conflict of emotions within her. "But I had not intended to tell you—yet." He smiled gently and patted the hand that he held.

"Tell me now and we shall have it over with, and be happy."

Thus do we so often approach our big moments with smiling unconsciousness! Katherine hesitated and turned her face away from him. Of course she had planned to tell him—some time—for in her rather uneventful life this was the great emotional experience that stood forth almost luridly; but despite his tenderness, his words were almost casual: they betrayed his thought that her story would be the relation of some not unusual little grief magnified by her sensitiveness.

She had guessed aright; he was awaiting quite an ordinary little tale of a homestead lost through the unfaithfulness of some person of wealth; of her tiny patrimony squandered by such a one; and he yearned over her and knew how difficult it would be to refrain from taking her in his arms and murmuring that all

her troubles were at an end—that he, one of the despised class, would, in every fashion of love's suggestion, make up to her for what another had brought upon her.

He was rather sorry now, as a matter of fact, that he had invited it. He wished that he had waited: a mussy breakfast room with loud whiskings of the broom upon the upper stairs and frequently shouted directions to Fairy-godmother who was quite evidently obeying the demand to "slick up the parlour before she did the dishes"—such a setting was not ideal for the voicing of an exquisite minor. Yet—it would be over—this tiny rift in their happiness, and the long day would be theirs untroubled. She was feeling about for the best way to make it simple and forthright; he knew that intuitively. Her face was turned away from him.

"The story that I wrote last—the happy story—was the purest imagination. To me it seemed frightfully—untrue—unreal. I never knew such characters, and I'm sure that they would not have acted that way if I had, for my experience has been—quite different." She paused. "But the other—the illogical tragedy—the one which was not plausible," she smiled bitterly, "that was—true. Life is not always—plausible."

He started. It was almost as if he had a premonition of a coming evil.

"The girl who married the wealthy young aristocrat, and who, under circumstances almost identical with those in the story, committed suicide was—my little sister. Mollie died—that way."

"My God!" The words were almost inaudible. There was the terrible pity of it. The thing was not a story to her. It was real!—dragged from the grief rooted in her soul! And he had smiled at it—joked about it! Then an aspect flashed itself into his brain—an odd, trivial thing:

"But your Mollie was not on the stage surely?"

Her head bowed in assent. "Yes, for about six months only—not long enough to do more than begin a promising career. She had rehearsed so long for it, dear little maid! Mother was so desperately ill all the while that I could not leave her—could scarcely find time to write to the child, and she was busy—and happy. She had met the man—and they were having such good times together. She wrote me of it in fragments so that I had no notion of how serious it was with her. Then things are blurred: her marriage and Mother's last acute attack from which she never rallied to consciousness—then the annulment and the child's last letter, in which she told

us of her purpose, came with Mother's death. Poor little Mollie! She was the happiest-hearted girl I ever knew! Oh, it was cruel of him—cruel!"

"Influenced by his father?" The words came from a dry throat. How this story bent the unbearable brilliance of white light upon an incident in his own life! Yet how different in actuality it was!

"No; his father was dead. His brother was his guardian; he was within his legal rights, of course, for Mollie's husband was under age. Legal rights!" There was an infinite scorn in her voice. "As if a year made him less her husband—less the father of her child!"

Martin had drawn away from her—he was quivering in every fibre of his body. The thing overwhelmed him. It couldn't be true, of course—it was just a ghastly sensitiveness of his that fitted the parts together. He scarcely heard what she said though he desperately tried to hold his attention to the words.

"Of course he was a mere boy—I try to remember that—he was blinded to his real responsibility by his brother who never even took the trouble to find out about Mollie—and us! Oh, he killed her—that man!"—passionately—"killed her as surely as if with his own hands he had crushed the life out of her——

Forgive me; I ought not to have—told you—now!"

He reached out blindly and caught at the straw:

"She was known—on the stage—by the name of Mollie Woods?"

She looked at him unseeingly for an instant and then a wave of infinite contrition overwhelmed her as she slowly realized his ghastly pallor—the lines newly drawn about his mouth.

"Please—please, dear—take little Fairy-godmother and go out into the sunshine and forget about it! I did not dream that it could——"

"She was Mollie Woods?" He had not seemed to hear her.

"No, dear lad—not on the stage: she kept to her middle name; she was Mary Lee!"

He steadied himself with the hand that rigidly gripped the table. The last part had snapped into place.

"God!" Martin whispered it. It could not be. Things like that did not happen in real life! This was a dream. He would wake up in a moment!

"Don't, dear, don't!" she was murmuring, grief stricken. "I should not have bothered you with our little tragedy. It is all over and done with now. The dear girl had her happiness for a little while.

That must have meant much to her. I try to remember that. The young husband was drowned on the *Titanic*—it seemed poetic justice—and the debt is paid. Only I am left and I am going to be happy—surely, dear"—there seemed a sudden hint of disaster in his white-faced misery—"surely I am going to be happy?"

"God knows that I want that—more than anything else in the world." His voice held almost the reverent pleading of a prayer. He could not let it go—this big happiness of theirs: there must be proof on proof. He grasped the nettle with hands already pierced. "Your sister's husband was—Robert Martin?"

"Yes. I hoped that every one had forgotten the circumstances. I did not know that you could identify them." Her voice was low.

"I—knew him—and his brother—rather well."

"Every one knows the brother," she said in soft-voiced bitterness. "He takes good care that every one shall—through his marvellous benefactions which are always flaunted upon the front pages of the newspapers. And his engagement is rumoured at least once every season. I wonder—when I see it—whether the girl that he finally marries will love him enough to—give him up when it seems his wish—

even though it mean her own and another's—life." The word ended in a little sob.

"Oh, girl—stop! Stop!" He paused, looking at her dazedly, unsure what it was best to do. "God help me—I—can't stand this! I—forgive me—Katherine—my own precious little Princess; I can't bear that—things should have hurt you so!" He went from her swiftly. Even his broken words did not register truly the turmoil in his soul. She gazed after him with tear-wet, dreamy eyes.

How he loved her—this big lad of hers! Blithe and debonair by nature, how sensitive he was to the hurt of one for whom he cared! She had learned a lesson that morning. She would guard him from her moods of depression always. He must not suffer in her suffering. She had not imagined that men were like that. Yet, despite an almost aggressive masculinity at times, he had that indefinable charm, that strength of tenderness and sweetness—she could think of no other way to phrase it truly—which was suggestive of the feminine.

Idly she picked up a letter that was lying upon the windowsill where Comfort had tossed it among the rest. The letter was addressed to Mr. William Bland, and the return, rather crampedly placed in the corner, read: "Martindale-on-the-Hudson."

Katherine's eyes narrowed puzzledly and she held them riveted on the lower left-hand corner where the same cramped writing had meticulously guarded against lack of complete information in address: "Care of Mr. Charles E. Martin."

There was a gurgle of laughter at the door and Katherine, still staring at the envelope as if some obsession were making her the victim of an illusion, said slowly:

"Fairy-godmother, come here! What do you suppose this means?"

CHAPTER XX

WHEN Katherine Woods called Comfort to look at the address upon the envelope which she held in her hand, she did so merely to gain assurance of her own steadiness of vision. She felt that in some fashion the story of Mollie's tragic end—just related to the man she loved—had caused her eyes to play a trick upon her. Fairy-godmother glanced it over without a quiver of exceptional interest.

"Oh—that's Mr. Bland's, isn't it? He's gone out, but I'll swiffle it under his door 'cause he won't look for it here. It is the first one he's had."

"But—see, dear—what does that mean?" Katherine pointed to the words in the corner and Fairy-godmother read them slowly aloud:

"'Care of Mr. Charles E. Martin.'" Clearly she saw nothing wrong about it. "Shall I give it to Mr. Prince?" she asked. "He'd take care of it all right." She took it from Katherine's limp hands with a sigh. "Oh, dear; maybe it's to say that they have to go."

"Go? Where? Why should they go?" It was clear enough who were the "they."

"Oh, 'way," Comfort was vague in her information. "Mr. Bland said that they might, and I asked Mr. Prince."

"Yes?" It was dully spoken.

"He said that they might, too. You see the man whose job he's got up and come back on him."

"Who—did what?" Fairy-godmother never made a misstatement but at times her innocence of real significances led her far astray. Just what this indicated Katherine was at a loss to know.

"Why, Mr. Prince was sick and he didn't have any job and so he took another man's, and now that man has up and come back on him and prob'ly wants it." This, at least, was open to no mis-interpretation.

"How did you know that Mr. Prince was sick? I believe you must be mistaken, dear, for he has been with Mr. Carruthers for ever so long. He has told me about things they used to do years and years ago." A light broke over Comfort's face—and a look of alarm.

"Oh, dear! I'll be in a mess the first thing I know. Guess I'd better go and give Mr. Prince the letter to take care of."

Katherine smiled uncertainly. "Your fairy lore leads you into a great many fancies, little girl," she said, holding the slim little form close for an instant —a caress that was returned with a breathless hug.

"I'll take the letter up in a l'il minute," she decided, laying it on the table. "I can't waste another smitch from my dishes."

Sturdily resolving to let no misgivings daunt her, Katherine took up the paper which Mrs. Prouty had sent to her and glanced over the headlines softly humming an old love song that she remembered her mother used to sing. Carefully she folded the paper inside out and, as she did so, the double-column cut of a picture caught her eye; it was the reproduction of a landscape, and inset with it was a smaller reproduction—a profile that she knew very well indeed. She caught the paper to her and scanned the lines below it: "'Nocturne,' a study by Pierre Le Jeune; (inset) Charles Edward Martin by whose generosity this masterpiece has now become the property of the Metropolitan Museum."

"Comfort," she said, in a strained, husky voice: "Look—who is that?" She laid her fingers over the lines below. The child laid a soft cheek against her arm and gazed interestedly at the picture.

"Why, it's Mr. Prince, isn't it?" she exclaimed delightedly. "Not so very good of his nose, though."

Hands clutched at the heart of Katherine Woods —strange, grim hands of Fate—and her arms grew numb, as tense pain, probing clear to her finger-tips, loosened the grasp on the paper. It fell unheeded. She reached for the letter and gazed at it long again.

"No, Comfort," she whispered, "that isn't Mr. Prince; it is Mr. Charles Martin. It is just—that they look alike," she said passionately to herself, "just the veriest bit alike. . . . It couldn't be—oh, it couldn't be!" [the letter held her] "yet—'Care of Mr. Charles E. Martin'" [the memory of his going was strong upon her]; "so—that was why—that was why—oh, it couldn't be true!" She dropped into the chair and hid her face against the child. "Oh, little Fairy-godmother, is our house of dreams coming tumbling down?" There was a frightened sob held in the words of it, and Fairy-godmother clasped her close.

"Oh, dearest—dearest, True Princess! What is it about Mr. Prince? Trooly-rooly he is the real prince. He isn't just a play one for he lived at the Palace and I went to see him there. It was a vee-ry, vee-ry grand palace!"

Katherine Woods slowly raised her head and looked at the child—looked at her as if she would see the very heart of her and, in its limpid depths, learn the truth about this horrible business. When she spoke she was very gentle and tender, but there was a hopelessness in her tone as of one who knows that the truth will be bitter, yet will have it all.

"Comfort, dear, tell me everything you know about this. When did you go to see Mr. Prince at the Palace? Where is the Palace and why did you go there?"

Comfort felt that she might as well make a clean breast of it. After all, when the True Princess understood, she would forgive her for keeping a secret from her.

"Well, you see it was this way," she began in a conversational tone. "It was the morning that Stepmother read about his being at the Palace for a few days after he had come back from England."

"Yes, yes, dear; but that was—Mr. Martin, not Mr. Prince."

"But people just called him Martin because they didn't know he was a real prince," Comfort assured her. "So I went to the Palace that very morning after I had done the dishes and got my peeling for lunch off."

"But"—utterly bewildered—"why did you go?" Somehow a frightful muddle was made of things—a muddle that would be straightened out as soon as she could get at the bottom of Comfort's thought.

The child hesitated, then lifted her head staunchly.

"It was because you cried," she said with a gentle candour, "and wouldn't take my money when you needed it for Stepmother; and you said you would take it if a prince gave it to you. So of course I went to him and asked him——"

"Oh, child, child! What have you and your fairy-loving heart done? Tell me just what happened."

"I went to the Palace——"

"Yes—the Plaza; I know—I heard Stepmother read it."

"And Mr. Bland let me in to see him."

"Mr. Bland?"

"Yes. He lives with Mr. Prince you know, and answers the telephone and picks up the magazines that Mr. Prince throws down."

"I understand about Mr. Bland now," she said very quietly, "and it explains much. Go on. Whom did you see?"

"Mr. Prince, of course. He had been sick and was lying down but he had me tell him all about Mr.

Gnome and Stepsister and the Giant when he found out that I was fairy godmother. He was much intrusted."

"I should think that he might be." She must keep stern hold upon herself as long as she could, so that the child would not know what she had done. "Did"— the question seemed intolerable—"did you tell him—about me?"

"Oh, my, yes," Comfort assented eagerly. "He was most intrusted of all in you—when I told him you were the True Princess."

"What else did you—tell him?"

"Oh, I told him that you wrote stories, but that everybody had so many that they couldn't buy them."

"O-h-h!" It was a soft cry from the depths.

"When he said that he didn't have any, I asked him if he didn't want them; but he said that he was not in the business so he couldn't buy them very well." The girl gripped her quivering hands tensely and Comfort went on quickly: "Then he called Mr. Carruthers on the 'phone and asked him to buy one anyway—maybe two—and he would pay for them."

"But surely, Comfort—surely Mr. Prince is not—why did he come here—why did he change his name? Why——"

"Well, you see I told him that just buying wasn't

much like a trooly fairy story and that he ought to come and resker you because you were the True Princess; and he thought it over and said he would. He was crazy to come, but Mr. Bland wasn't," she admitted truthfully. "He thought," her memory could not let it become obliterated, "he thought the servus would be bad."

"But," the poor little princess refused to believe it, "but Mr. Prince is with Mr. Carruthers. He could not be untrue in that; that is no fairy story."

"That's the job he got after he was sick and lost his," Comfort told her. "He told me, because I was worried about it, that he had got a job, but it belonged to a man who was sick himself. And I guess the man's got well now because Mr. Prince told me that he was going away soon."

"When did he—tell you that?"

"Yesserday; and Mr. Bland's quit the dress goods."

Katherine's quiet deceived the child as she put the question to her: "Comfort, tell me just one thing, without any fairy story in it—because sometimes we can't have fairy stories mixed up with life: Is Mr. Prince really the Mr. Charles Martin who lived at the Plaza, and is Prince just a fairy name for him?"

"Trooly and rooly he's a prince—no fairy or any-

thing—but at the Palace and in the papers they call him 'Martin' because they don't know. He told me" (her voice sank to a whisper) "that I was the on'y one that had 'discovered' him. That was why I wanted him to come in disguise and not just send you the money for Stepmother." The child put her arms about the bowed shoulders, but suddenly the True Princess sprang to her feet and thrust her off.

"Oh, my God, my GOD!" she whispered to herself, brokenly, twisting her hand in torture, "what have I ever done to be hurt so? Dear God—it can't be true!"

"Dearest True Princess, are you vee-ry ill? What shall I do? Does it help you to twist your hand that way? Wait; let me run and get Mr. Prince!"

"No—no!" passionately. "I am going away—ever and ever so far away! I will never see you—any of you, ever!" The child gazed at her with wide, terror-stricken eyes and held her fast.

"But—*me*—preciousest True Princess! Surely you won't leave ME? Why—I'm Fairy-godmother!" The anguish of the pleading pierced.

"It has been a black magic that you have used upon me, Fairy-godmother!" she said, looking down with burning eyes and freeing herself from the clinging arms untenderly. "You have torn down my

house of dreams and you have changed the Prince back into the hideous beast that he was! All the words that were diamonds and pearls are now toads and scorpions!" It was the language that Fairy-godmother could but understand for it was her own tongue. Her Princess had left her, and she looked long and silently at the doorway through which she had disappeared up the black stairs. Her little face was working with grief but for a long time she strangled back the sobs. At last she could control herself no longer. She threw herself on the chair by the table and buried her head in her arms.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she sobbed, "I wish I was dead and had never been borned! I'm not a fairy godmother a tall, I'm a nawful old witch!"

CHAPTER XXI

IT WAS thus that Mrs. Prouty found her, twenty minutes afterward. Her sobs had ceased but her head still lay in her slim arms as she pondered in childish fashion how best to undo the evil spell she had wrought. It was a very difficult thing to think out—for, you see, she did not know in the least just what the trouble was.

Now Mrs. Prouty was not one of those whom the sight of grief softens. Emotional by nature, given to hysteria herself, and wildly moved to tears by affecting stories and plays, the presence of a genuine sorrow left her sympathies high and dry—as very often happens. The one fact that came to her through the vision of the child's quite unaccustomed distress was the gigantic enormity of a slighted task.

Just how she expressed her opinion of one who would leave the dishes undone so long—especially when that one had been really rescued by her from the terrors of an orphan asylum or the poor house, and God knows she hadn't been worth her salt—it is not necessary to relate.

It was thus it happened that Comfort did not follow out her first drearily made decision to go upstairs and tell Mr. Prince all about it, and that she couldn't go to the p'rade because witches had no right to live—much less have pleasure. She almost rejoiced in Stepmother's harsh words and the slap that stung her cheek. She deserved all the horrible things in the world, for she had used her fairy power so that it wrought disaster—and disaster to one for whom she would gladly have yielded up her loving little body as a sacrifice, had it been demanded. If only she could know just what was the matter! Clearly it had to do with Mr. Prince, she pondered—no less stricken but more nearly controlled—as she sozzled the mop in the suds and applied it languidly to the plates. Perhaps if she told Mr. Prince he would be angry, too. He had a right to be, she considered—for had she not, in disobedience to his commands, told the True Princess all about him?

Yet, somehow, she had fancied that she was saving the Princess a greater hurt! It was the newspaper that had revealed him. Perhaps the Princess would not go. Perhaps, when Mr. Prince talked to her that afternoon (for they had confided to Fairy-godmother the fact that they were planning an expedition

together), perhaps he would persuade her to stay. He could doubtless explain about the paper and the names he had given him by people who did not know him in his true character. Not that Fairy-godmother reasoned it out even as lucidly as that, but such was the tenor of the thought that suddenly leaped to a conclusion. She would take the paper to Mr. Prince and ask him what to do. She went swiftly back to the dining room, but the paper was gone. Stepmother had evidently taken it. She wiped her hands carefully on her apron and took up the letter addressed to Mr. Bland, and, in the toilsome way that the body moves when the spirit is crushed within it, she climbed the stairs and knocked at Martin's door. There was no sound of reply but she was not nonplussed.

"It's just"—she paused, and then a sob shook her voice—"it's just Comfort Browne."

The voice that met her ears was husky and a whit irritable.

"I'm sorry, Comfort, but I cannot open the door at present. Is it important? The bed can wait, can't it?"

The tone was like a fresh blow, and she shivered.

"It isn't—that," she faltered. "They's a letter

here for Mr. Bland—and it says for you to take care of it." She paused and was turning away but she could not quite give up her purpose. "The True Princess saw about the name," she added. The words meant nothing to the young man hunched in his chair—and the suggestion of the girl only made the pain of his problem keener.

"Don't—don't bother me, Comfort. Slip the letter under the door. I'll see that Bland gets it." Comfort obeyed, blind with tears—and then she hesitated. The vision of her Princess's face, as she last saw it, suddenly overwhelmed her. For the first time in her life the child was suffering from that torment of the artistic imagination—the power of vivid visualization. A lone sob burst from her in her anguish.

"Oh, please, dear, dear Mr. Prince; I want to see you dust as soon as it won't bother you too much. I—I have a dreffful trouble!"

"I have a dreffful trouble, too, Fairy-godmother." Martin's voice was softer, but still kindly firm. "As soon as I can think out my trouble, we'll take up yours. Come back in half an hour, and we'll see what can be done."

Half an hour! If he had said half a month or half a year it would have seemed no longer to the child.

But she had done what she could. An instinctive and delicate courtesy, which was one of her most deeply rooted characteristics, prevented her thrusting herself further upon him. Was his "dreffful trouble" something that had to do with the Princess? Her intuition told her that it was. Oh, dear! Suppose that she had bewitched him, too! If he looked as his voice sounded, his eyes must have the same expression that she had seen in the big brown eyes of her Princess not nearly an hour ago. Was everything going to be terrible after this? Would he, too, go away and never, never see her again? This aspect of the sorrow that was upon her troubled her lightly, however, compared to the childish agony (than which nothing is crueller) of being the cause of grief to her best beloveds.

For the first time her faith wavered. Just suppose that there really were not any fairies that had been helping her. Suppose they had fooled her and were little red imps that were laughing now at what they had made her do? She fled down the stairs like one tormented indeed, and flung herself upon the cupboard dragging out a soiled and battered volume. It was well that Mrs. Prouty did not appear at the door, for her small slavey, with rumpled curls and tear-wet eyes, was murmuring to herself in a mono-

tone, punctuated by sobbing breaths, the words that she found in the book:

> And this is what Olga saw: First a little Fairy Castle and the fairies opening their windows and dusting their rooms and hanging out the bedclothes to air. Then the drawbridge was lowered and the Fairy Queen came out in a beautiful coach of a pretty pearl shell with wheels of cypress vine and a canopy of a single roseleaf still fresh with dew. The Queen fairy was very beautiful and as she sat in her chariot she was accompanied by six attendant fairies who flew along each side to keep guard.

"She saw them in a ray of sunshine," murmured Comfort, tensely, "and they're there—oh, I know they're there—but if I could only see them!" Her eyes were fixed on a smoke-streaked shaft of light that penetrated the smeary window and she did not know that some one was standing at the threshold of the kitchen—some one tall and pale and very, very anxious. He held a letter in his hand, and was speaking her name. Suddenly she looked up at him, through mist.

"It's no use," she whispered half to him and half to herself. "I can't see them—but oh, I know they are there!"

"Comfort," the voice was deep and controlled, "did you say that—Miss Woods—had seen the address on this?" He held up the letter addressed to Mr. Bland.

"Yes, Mr. Prince," the child replied, pulling herself wearily from the floor and going back to her dishes, "she saw it."

"What did she say?" He picked up a glass that she had but just wiped and filled it with water from the tap, drinking it thirstily. His hand was shaking, she noticed. Yes, clearly his dreffful trouble, too, had to do with the True Princess.

"She said that it was black magic that I'd used on her," the child sobbed, catching his hand, "and oh, Mr. Prince, was it, trooly-rooly? And the words that were di'monds and pearls are now toads and score pins! Did I knock her house down, Mr. Prince; did I, trooly-rooly? Oh, it seems sif I had to die, I hurt so! And maybe they aren't any fairies or surely they'd let me see 'em just a teenty once!"

So this was the "dreffful trouble!" Martin's heart grew unutterably tender and self-reproachful. This baby and he had both hurt most what they loved most, and their suffering seemed unbearable! He slipped his arm about her and somehow both seemed comforted. How much his former impatience had lost he did not dare think.

"Now tell me all about it," he said. She told him, omitting nothing, quoting accurately, save for words that she stumbled over, painting for him

vividly the tragic scene in the dining room an hour before. When she came to the end and the announcement of the True Princess that she was going away forever, he started.

"Go to her room, Fairy-godmother," he counselled suddenly, "quickly as you can! Tell her that surely —listen, dear, surely her sense of justice will make her give me a hearing—tell her that she is doing us both an incalculable—a very grievous—wrong." He chose the simpler word as her eyes shadowed and her lips paused in her memorizing. Then she sped away and he followed her to the first floor, striding up and down the tawdrily furnished parlour. The child seemed to be gone an interminable age. The front door bell sounded loudly and persistently. Mrs. Prouty—muttering unmentionable things about strays that oughter be in a norphans' home for all the good they was—floundered to the door and admitted some one with a voice that to Martin's ears, intent upon one quality of sound alone, seemed only vaguely familiar.

"I'll see if Miss Woods is home," Mrs. Prouty was saying with her usual *empressment* as she ushered the visitor into the parlour. "I ain't heard her go out, but you can't never tell. She's so quiet and ladylike."

"Mr. Prince!"

"Mrs. Ogden!" A wave of gratitude for the powers that had brought this about came to him. Mrs. Ogden, he suddenly realized, was the only person in the world who would understand. Perhaps she could plead his cause with Katherine! It took a woman to appeal to a woman! He felt sure of Mrs. Ogden's staunchness. He had had much evidence of a sturdy quality of her fineness of spirit.

"Mrs. Ogden," he said as Mrs. Prouty disappeared upward, "I am very sure that I was never so glad to see any one in my life."

A smile, half questioning, half pleased, winged its way delicately to him in acknowledgment.

"I am glad," she said simply, "for my coming is, perhaps, rather—reckless. I—I did not know just what to do. I felt that I must see—Miss Woods. Perhaps we shall both be glad that you are here."

"It is about her that I——" He stopped suddenly, for Comfort entered—a pinched faced, big-eyed, frightened little Comfort who was tremblingly holding out a note toward him.

"I can't read all of it—the writing is squiggly—but this was pinned to it for Stepmother." She held out a bank note, and realized Mrs. Ogden's presence without any feeling of surprise.

Martin snatched the paper from her quivering fingers and read it through twice while his face grayed, and little lines sprang into being about his mouth. His hand fell limp and he walked purposelessly to the window and looked up and down the street. The nails dug into his palms as he forced himself to speak.

"She has gone," he said dully.

The full significance of it flashed upon Mrs. Ogden's consciousness in all of its immensity. He thought that she was going to fall, and moved toward her.

"Do you think that she will—not come back?" she asked through dry lips though something within her told her that the question was a mockery. His words had been simple; there was nothing in them to cause this feeling of desperate futility of beating against Fate. It was the way he said them that vivified her unacknowledged premonition that she had come—too late.

"She says—here—that she will not." He crushed the note in his hand though a wave of pleading flooded Comfort's face. It was all that she had left of her True Princess! "And I believe that—it is true."

"But why—why?" Mrs. Ogden's cry was a little

wild. "Was she not happy? Why did she go in this sudden way? There's something you're keeping from me!"

Comfort had crept close to him and he had put an arm about her as if some invisible bond had suddenly strengthened between them. His desire to tell Mrs. Ogden had melted away in the swift burning of his pain. He felt now that he could not speak of her to any one—least of all one who did not know her. He wished that she would leave him alone with the child—so that he could think. . . . There was an address in the note to which her few possessions —save the necessary things that had evidently gone into the bag that she carried away—were to be sent. He recognized the name as that of an old negress of whom she had often spoken in telling him gay little stories of life in the South.

This was his one clue. "Mammy Liza" might have been taken into confidence. More than that —yes, surely she would go straight to the old home place where were those who had known her and hers and had loved them. The comfort he took in this was short-lived. An entire revulsion of belief followed. It would be, of course, the last place that she would go—to the address which he had in his hands. To think otherwise would be to believe her

guilty of the ordinary sort of coquettish lure—a wily leaving of the end of the thread which, if followed, would bring him to her. No—she of all the women he had ever known would be least likely to do that sort of thing! If the old servant indeed knew of her whereabouts, she would have been sealed to secrecy.

There was Carruthers! Surely she would not neglect the field she had ploughed and sown and nurtured to the harvest. And the means to Carruthers's knowledge was right to his hand: with her quick insight and intuitive knowledge of the psychological movements of her sex, Mrs. Ogden might be of inestimable help, if she would; and that she would, he felt sure.

"Mrs. Ogden," he said simply, "something very terrible has happened." She put a quick hand to her throat.

"You don't think that she has——?"

"No—thank God! I feel sure of that. I know that she will live it through—and it is that that I dread for her. She has had a hard, wearisome pull with living—and I thought to have ended the bitterness of it for her. Instead, however, I have increased it. I know that I have made it so cruelly hard that—the way out which you thought of would be a blessed relief."

"Tell me," pleaded little Mrs. Ogden passionately. "I must know! I have a right to know!"

He looked at her, dimly conscious that she had said something which he did not understand. Yes, he would tell her. His brain was now so blurred that he could not think clearly. Perhaps she could help him. He paced up and down the room as he talked in a low voice, Comfort following him with anxious eyes, recognizing the facts as they passed in review before her memory, but realizing that some of them were fraught with a significance to the other two that she could not grasp.

He began with Comfort's visit to the Plaza.

"My name," he said in hasty explanation—as a matter which was of no consequence, "is not Prince, Mrs. Ogden. Fairy-godmother and I adopted that as a fairy pleasantry. It happens, however, that it was a rather cruel disguise—for my real name is one that Miss Woods has had every reason to abhor. Of course I did not know that. I could not know it. It was not until this morning that I realized how this simple little fairy play of ours had made a frightful mess of things." Mrs. Ogden looked at him with new eyes. As with Martin, all parts snapped into place suddenly.

"Oh-h!" she said in a strangling breath. She

gained control of herself with a mighty effort. "Please go on," she said composedly with a defiant little lift to her chin even as she swallowed the choking in her throat.

He kept nothing back. There before the child who loved him and—had he but known it—the woman who hated him, he poured out the story of his love for his True Princess. The reserve of Charles Martin had burst its barriers. In an agony that he had never dreamed could exist for him he reproached himself for the cruel wrong that he had done in the past to one she loved—he did not reveal more than that—and for the selfish cowardice that had kept him tongue-tied when he might have eased for her the hurt that must come. Had he had time to gather together his forces, he had not revealed the depths of his self-loathing; the tempest of his love; the passion of his grief. He could not make it a partial revealment when he undertook to tell the story: he could not soften a phrase, polish a sentence, eliminate an emotion. It must be said as it came to him—an outpouring of mind and heart rather than a set explanation of the facts that existed.

For the rest of his life that day was a scorching memory to Charles Martin, for it was the only time in his existence that he was guilty of a spiritual

immodesty. Two human beings knew what he thought of himself—and that is a dangerous thing for any one to know. Yet it served a precious purpose—that stark, flaming truth—for it transformed an enemy into a friend. No doubt could exist of his sincerity—and no woman's heart could remain unmoved at the sight of his grief.

When he had quite done, and in a sudden wild desire to be alone, had moved swiftly to the doorway, Mrs. Ogden went to him and laid a gentle hand upon his arm.

"We shall find her," she said simply. "I feel it. I can help you—if you will let me. You must not blame yourself beyond your due. Perhaps I have done her a greater wrong than you, but—like you—I thought it best at the time. One cannot tell," she added drearily. "One cannot tell until, sometimes, it is too late!"

He looked at her vaguely—unsure that he had heard her aright. Was she trying to comfort him—to make it easier in a conventional fashion? How could she, who knew Katherine Woods only as a name, have done her wrong?

"You mean——" He moistened his lips as if to make the words distinct. "You say that you, too, have done her injury?"

She paused a moment and looked at him with grave eyes which saw the haggard grief that had made him suddenly old. Then she held out her hand.

"Mr. Martin," she said gently, "I am Mary Lee!"

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN Katherine Woods had reached her "squinty" room, she had swiftly flung her possessions in two piles: a scant one of necessary articles that were to go into the bag she carried; the rest—dear feminine delights that she had purchased in golden days to make herself lovely in the eyes of her prince—went into the small trunk to be shipped South. Mammy Liza, faithful and true, was now her only friend. It was to the old coloured woman alone that she wrote—save the note that, addressed to Fairy-godmother, bore its material assuagement of Mrs. Prouty's grief at losing the boarder of the skylight room. She had worded it for two pairs of eyes. She knew that Comfort had trouble in reading her "squiggly" writing. The wild, passionate kiss that she pressed upon its smooth surface was the period which ended her old life.

The Katherine Woods who paced back and forth in the Grand Central Station awaiting the train that was to bear her far to the Northwest had crushed

Martin even from the margin of her thoughts with a bitterness whose intensity she did not dare to acknowledge. To admit that with him had gone all that serves to make the life of the spirit beautiful would have been to realize the depths of her despair —and that would be dangerous. She had fought one fight in the past, and it must come no more with its gruelling fire. The sign of her victory was a white box buried under the trees in Central Park. Beyond this decision, purified in a past crucible, she had chosen her destination haphazard. She knew no one in the city that marked the end of her journey. She only wanted to get away as far as one third of the sum that was her all would take her.

She would write Mammy Liza, she had told the dusky servitor, "when she was settled." She had smiled bitterly over the phrase. Not that she was afraid to trust Mammy, for she knew that wild horses would not drag the information from the old negress after she had read the letter that contained it. She had told bits of the story for she knew that mention of Mollie—her baby Mollie—would add grief's seal to her lips. Mammy was safety itself. Swiftly she realized that, despite the present unendurable pain, she must keep on, and the only sane way was to keep on as she had begun. She foresaw

questioning of Carruthers and probing of other editorial offices. . . . Mammy would be the go-between—the junction where her manuscripts changed their postmark.

How she would write! She looked forward to it with a frenzied eagerness. A tremendous desire was upon her suddenly for money. Money she must have that—he—might be paid. Each moment that she was in his debt was a torture to her. She resolved to crush out of her new life all but the one purpose—to get money.

She crept into her berth early that night—exhausted and aching with a physical hurt—for her tortured soul seemed very near the bounds of the flesh. Her body burned with pain, and the whirr of the wheels beneath her seemed grinding into her nerves. Dully she heard laughter—and wondered if she could ever laugh again. The fancy seemed to mock her with its "crown of sorrow." The cool air crept through the car as the lights were lowered. She slept fitfully—starting up at a sudden stop, and gazing out into unknown lands—strange and weird and fantastic as the night-shadowed, unknown stretches of the experience through which she was travelling, having at the journey's end—what? With the thought she would sink back with a little moan

It was an hour after the departure of Mrs. Ogden. Following hard upon the staggering discovery of her identity and its story, she and Martin had talked of plans for search—only to come to the conclusion that the "little sister's" advice of patience was the only one to pursue. Nothing was so difficult for Martin as inactivity. Pacing up and down his room, he slowly came to the maddening realization that this dreary emptiness of the world would stretch itself on and on, from day to day—sunshiny days, rainy days whose drops were "like the wet kisses of little baby fairies." The words came to him out of that wonderful past. He groaned. She was bound up with everything beautiful and tender in life!

There was a knock on the door and Bland appeared.

"Peters is below, sir," he said. "'E told me that 'e waited, sir, hover a hour at the plice you said, huntil 'e fancied that 'e must be wrong. So 'e kyme hup 'ere, sir. Hi directed 'im to wait at the corner, sir."

"Quite right, Bland. Throw some things into my bag. I am going to Martindale. You settle things here, and follow to-morrow with the trunks. Wait. Ask the little Fairy-godmother to come up here. We'll have Peters take us about a bit to make up for the loss of a parade." It was a new thoughtfulness in Martin—but then, it was a new Martin.

"Very good, sir." It was indeed "very good" with Bland. With the mention of Martindale, a wonderful peace overspread his countenance and he was again the duteous and irreproachable servant. Bland loved service, and so it goes without saying that he was an artist at it. He had no liking for the anomalous part that he had been playing. He felt disgraced by being "in tryde" even for so short a time. He was not accustomed to mingling with tradespeople. He had sprung from that aristocracy than which there is none more absolute—the aristocracy of "below stairs." For generations his people had been of consequence in servants' hall—dictators often, and always of the hierarchy. It hurt his dignity to be forced into companionship with those whose commercial souls were bare of reverence for livery. The fact that they had seemed to accept him upon an equal footing with his master but argued to him the hopelessly crude quality of their gentility. Their easy democracy made him shudder.

But now, with a new spring in his step, he sought out Fairy-godmother. His master's whims were at an end! He had come to his senses. Jolted, too, evidently; but discreet servants do not admit such revelations even to themselves. Suffice it that he had come safely out of his vagaries, and now there

was to be peace—and plenty. With an air of ease, and that gracious obsequiousness characteristic of his prideful service, he had ushered Fairy-godmother into his master's room and had stood attentive until, with instructions to make ready for a ride, she had scampered out again. Rides with princes do not happen every day!—and they would find the Princess.

Though the golden air filled him with a new courage, Martin found it a bit difficult explaining things to Fairy-godmother. At the suggestion of his going, her eyes grew very big and her mouth all trembly tired. She did not understand it at all. If the Princess came back, he would not be there. Helplessly he felt about for words that would make it clear. The fact that Martindale offered secluded peace and opportunity for thinking out the best methods of quest—as well as the least harassing haven in which to spend the time until he might put into action those of which he had already thought—this would mean nothing to the child. And he felt that she should be considered, next to the Princess herself. In fact, he had plans for her; but everything must give way now to the present problem.

Suddenly an inspiration came to him: "My kingdom, Fairy-godmother, must be put in order before

I can set out to rescue the Princess. Bad fairies have evidently been at work, and they must be outmanœuvred"; a gesture spurred the word over the hurdles to the goal of her understanding. "You and I can rout them: you to stay here; I to go on the quest. Each to report progress weekly. Never fear that we shall not find her; and never lose faith in us!"

Her eyes kindled. "I'll be your body-god," she announced. She did not know exactly what a "body-god" was, save that it was a necessary princely adjunct—and it had sounded very well in a story that the Princess had read to her. "Every prince has one," she added in explanation.

He smiled. "I think you will make a capital little body-god," he said. "Good-bye for the present, Fairy-godmother." They had returned to the corner after the ride. She encircled his neck with her slim little arms, laying a soft cheek against his.

"'Bye, Big Prince," she said in a quivery sort of a voice; "you'll come back soon, won't you? 'Cause if you don't"—she swallowed hard—"I'll—I'll—BUST!"

He patted her hand. "I'll come very soon," he promised her, "and meantime you must report. Remember you are to say simply that the Princess

was called away suddenly. That is what I have told Stepmother. It's the best face we can put on it at present. I am going to take my vacation. I'll write Mr. Cricket about it—so you may talk to him. Now, run along. I'm watching you until you reach the door."

She paused anxiously. "You haven't anything to find her with!" she exclaimed; "not a single-wingle thing!"

"To find her with?" he repeated, at sea as to this fairy meaning.

"Yes. You can't find her with nothing 'tall," she asserted in real anxiety. "You've got to have a thing of hers to find her with. All princes do or they wouldn't be 'cessful." Clearly this was a matter not to be lightly put aside! Suddenly a light flared in his understanding, and he thrust his hand deep into his pocket.

"Oh, but I have"; he was boyishly eager. "I'm sure I have the very thing to find a princess with," he repeated, and held in the palm of his hand a shiny crystal, blazing thing that made Fairy-godmother clap her hands for joy.

"Oh, goody, goody!" she cried. "You can't miss her for th' other one's on her li'l satin slipper!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE is a certain platitude, immortalized by being named among the "bromides," which leads one to the conclusion that the world is very small after all. The commonplace is usually jabbed in as a comment upon the unexpected crossing of two lines of existence which the hewers thereof have no particular desire to keep divergent—and the generality seems based upon rather insufficient data.

Now it is not the wish of mere chroniclers of circumstances (over which they have no control) to scintillate with sulphitic utterance, but there are times, be it recalled, when the world appears most remarkably large. Martin, who had circled it once and had paid flying visits to different sections of it many times, was now finding it tremendously spacious. In fact, as he eliminated—for various reasons that seemed sufficient to warrant such drastic action —all countries outside of these United (on Freedom's mountain height) States, he was beginning to realize that there are densely inhabited sections

even west of Albany, and that discovering a slim, brown-eyed, bubbly-haired girl—even if she chances to be a princess of the highest fairy ranking—is a difficult, not to say impossible, task. The search of the royal gentleman with the truant glass slipper was simple in comparison.

The month of June had passed without one step of progress in the quest. July, begun with radiant energy, discovered Martin midmonth, for the first time in his life, in New York City. He was vaguely surprised, although he would not have admitted it, at the number of people who were in town. That in itself was discouraging. She might even be within local telephoning distance, he realized desperately, and he would not be likely to discover her. His own ease in keeping out of the way of his group of friends —though to be sure they were not overturning heaven and earth to find him—was a saddening consideration.

His one hope of being able to trace Katherine through the editorial offices—which had suddenly seemed to vie with each other in securing her work —flared out ignominiously. All manuscripts were forwarded by Mammy Liza. One comfort alone the knowledge of their frequency brought him: judging from the fecundity of the imagination that supplied

her prolific typewriter, she must be physically well—and it was also a relief to feel sure that checks of considerable proportions were being sent on to Mammy Liza. That they arrived thence promptly and safe to Katherine's hand Mollie Ogden bade him never to doubt.

"Mammy is the old-time darky—faithful unto death," she told him, "and she would cut off her hand sooner than betray a trust to any member of the family. Besides, she especially worships Katsie who taught her to read and write—accomplishments which have been of great comfort to Mammy in her old age. I will dictate a letter for your sending, if you choose, but I feel that it will be unavailing."

She was quite right. The letter was returned to him at Martindale—the address rather painfully scrawled on the ensheathing envelope. It was smudged, and bore the unmistakable aroma of frying fat. Following hard upon it was a notice from an unpretentious New York bank informing him that two hundred dollars had been placed there to his credit. It was a blow that whipped the red, stinging blood into Charles Martin's cheeks. The faint clue that promised here was what had brought him back to New York, but it had come to naught. A letter written to Katherine and sent in Mammy's

care had been returned unopened and communications from Cricket and Fairy-godmother, likewise sent to her thus, met the same fate. Clearly Mammy's orders had been to forward nothing but the merest business communications and the checks which, it appeared, were duly deposited in the aforementioned unpretentious New York bank. Not even the might of the name of Martin could elicit information thence.

It was absurd that they should be baffled so! Each clue promised well, and each came to a sudden, definite termination. Katherine had hedged herself behind the two insurmountable defences which still exist in the midst of a more or less subsidizable world: the personal loyalty of a simple soul that knows nothing but to keep the faith, no matter what the cost; and the traditional and existent ideals of an institution to which honour is not a mere figurehead with a sufficient number of ciphers after it. These two alone knew her secret and these two would never divulge it. The matter began to take on a hopeless aspect.

Conferences between Martin and Mrs. Ogden were, in these days, inclined to be gloomy. It was in one of these that he had thoughtlessly flashed at her:

"We must move Mammy Liza in some way! Will

you go . . . ?" He stopped and bit his lip before her sad eyes lifted.

"I—cannot," she said simply. "You forget that —I am dead." She added thoughtfully: "That was the beginning of the mistake—but it does no good to bewail it now. I never dreamed how it would be! I fancied her there in the Rectory with Mother—free from the disgrace of it and only mourning me as dead. Sorrowing for death is an ennobling sort of grief; it does not corrode the soul as does disgrace. . . . I never dreamed that Katsie would have both to bear!" Her lips tremblêd, and he turned away with a slight shiver.

Carruthers and Cricket had been taken into confidence and both had thrown themselves heartfully into the quest. Both had smiled—in kindly aside—over the notion that the task would be in the least difficult, Carruthers with his hold upon Katherine in a business way and Cricket with a blithe assurance of a sentimental appeal. When they discovered that their masterly efforts did not even reach the person for whom they were intended, they were frankly astonished and chagrined. In reply to the protestations that there must be some avenue of appeal, Mollie Ogden shook her head with a sad little smile: "You don't know Mammy Liza——"

Carruthers, with a swift and delicate understanding of Mrs. Ogden's desperate need for all her mental and spiritual resources, had forborne to press further the matter which lay at his heart. In the desire to be of service to her, he had done for her as he would have had her, in like circumstances, do for him. In this magnificently altruistic adaptation of the golden rule to his conduct he made the mistake that a man usually makes when he treats a woman as he would be treated—he utterly missed her need and her longing. She could not translate his silence in his own terms.

Though her intuition told her that nothing could change that great heart which had so simply opened itself to her, she indulged a wilful and almost childish sensitiveness to the extent of quite misconstruing the gravely courteous reserve which verged upon formality. The apparition of concrete disgrace had appalled him at last, she fancied. To marry an unknown Mrs. Ogden—whatever her history—was one thing; to accept a much storied "Mary Lee," whose picture in a bizarre character part had adorned the front pages of yellow journals—was quite another. To be sure, that same picture had befriended her living self even if it had travestied her memory, for no one

would ever recognize her from its likeness. No; Mary Lee was dead, and there was no danger of her resurrection. Even if she should chance upon any of her former stage associates—and no such accident had yet befallen her or was likely to come to pass—they would see in her only a remarkable resemblance, if indeed they remembered her at all.

It was true that her identification with the first wife of Robert Ogden Martin had made a difference in Carruthers's attitude toward the matter of pressing the vantage which he could not but know that he held. It was, however, an aspect quite other than that which she fancied lay at bottom of his conventionally casual friendliness. At once, upon taking him into confidence, Martin had told him of his intention to undo so far as he could—in the pitifully inadequate measure that was left to him—the wrong that he had done her when she had been his brother's wife. He had determined to settle upon her the widow's portion of the estate of which his brother had died possessed, and to put into trust for David—until his coming of age—the remainder of the Martin fortune's equal division. Martin had foreseen a difficulty—which in fact eventuated—in making her accept this settlement on the ground

of its being her barest due, and had hoped that his old friend would aid him by persuasions.

This Carruthers, with a hard, unyielding gruffness, had almost violently refused to do. Martin, blind to all passion but his own, felt the ground giving way beneath his feet. If Jack Carruthers refused to stand by him! . . . Was he then, as Fairy-godmother told him the Princess had said, metamorphosed into the beast again? Then Carruthers made his confession—a word, a phrase, a gesture—and now, with the swift understanding of sympathy, Martin grasped the whole story and roundly cursed his own stupidity.

"So you see, I—can't, old man!" Carruthers finished miserably. "I can't even wish you success. For if it comes to you, I cannot conceive of myself going to her and saying in effect: 'My dear girl, will you do me the honour to let me provide the bread and butter, and perchance pay the rent—if you select something within my means—while you purchase the limousines and the *paté de foie gras* of our existence?'" Martin's heart grew hot within him.

"It might just happen"—he was dangerously near losing control—"that Mrs. Ogden does not estimate love in terms of limousines and *paté de fois gras*."

He had signified by rising that the interview was, on his part, reaching its conclusion. "If I were to tell you what I think of the man I care for most in this world, I'd say to you, Jack, that you are a damned fool!"

"Thanks," returned Carruthers, in like mood—for, although his fury against the author of his love's wretchedness had slacked when he had discovered that it was Martin, it had not died. "It might also happen, Charley, that Mrs. Ogden does not estimate notoriety, disgrace, humiliation, and loss of love of every sort in terms of limousines and *paté de foie gras*. I'd like to tell the man I love best in the world to keep his damned old money!" The blow struck home and Martin went white to the lips. It was a pulsating moment. The friendship of boyhood and manhood stood to be ruptured irrevocably.

It was Martin who saved the day. He grinned boyishly as he flung an arm about the shoulders of his friend in the old comradely way that had more than once reduced matters of great apparent pith and moment to the trivialities they were.

"Ain't it lucky, Jawn," he drawled impudently, "that we're willing to admit we're so confounded keen about each other?" Then they gripped, with the old, boyish heartiness.

Of this scene little Mrs. Ogden knew nothing. In fact, she had seen Carruthers only twice since her plea to be left to ponder her course. She had immediately resigned her position with him and had accepted another—far less remunerative and more exacting.

She had wondered idly why Cricket, and not John Carruthers, should have been entrusted with the mission of making clear to her that, by persistence in refusal, she was doing an incalculable injustice to her boy as well as evidencing an almost inhuman lack of responsiveness to Martin's sincere desire for restitution. With his inimitable kindly candour, Cricket made her see that it was sheer obstinacy which possessed her to refuse what was rightfully hers and the boy's, and it was his masterly pleading that finally convinced her of the futile and illogical vengefulness of her persistent obduracy.

The legal aspect of the settlement was swiftly arranged, and she suddenly found herself possessed of an income which seemed to her limitless—as indeed it was, with her slender demands upon it. The whole difference that it had made in her mode of life was that she withdrew from the seething city in late July and took a modest little cottage where David could have the advantage of the sea air and whole-

some country food. She had seen Carruthers just before leaving, and his formally worded congratulations chilled the heart of her. How could she know that a man whose great love was capable of giving and forgiving all, could not receive in the same spirit in which it would give? It was the last accusation which would have occurred to her. To her mind, her recent change of financial status was no more an intrinsic part of herself than a change of attire or abode. Her sensitive spirit veered helplessly from one explanation of his conduct to another, settling at last upon alternatives: either he was displeased with her acceptance of Martin's semblance of rehabilitation; or he could not bear the ignominy of marrying one who might be discovered some time to be the notorious (she spared no words that she might exculpate him the more readily) Mary Lee, publicly branded as an adventuress. Either was a conclusion which she could in no wise explain away. Time alone could right it if anything could. Meanwhile, she threw herself wholeheartedly into the baffling search for Katherine.

It was so ridiculously easy to trace her as far as Mammy—and then all things came to an end. The swift and unconditional return of Fairy-godmother's letter was the death of the final hope of evading or

humanizing the swarthy Cerberus. Mollie Ogden's punishment for her three years of silence was fully commensurate with the enormity of her mistake. It was almost more than she could endure to note Martin's swift aging, told in the spatter of gray at his temples and the lines about his mouth; and the drooping of Fairy-godmother made her catch her breath in terror.

"The child won't live through another six months of this," she told Martin desperately. "We must —must think of a way."

Martin had secured for the child from Mrs. Prouty an indeterminate vacation which he had planned that she should spend with the Ogdens. (She had conceived a wondrously maternal affection for David!) To his utter amazement, Fairy-godmother refused. The Princess might come back! He tried to explain, but she was sweetly obdurate. A single week-end she granted him, but even that was filled with a nervous agitation. She was so sure that the Princess was arriving in her absence! His cheerful endeavour to keep up her hope of success in the face of every rebuff was now working to his disadvantage: the only means which would have moved her from Mrs. Prouty's would have been to discourage hope of their finding the Princess, and this he was not able

—either for her sake or his own—to bring himself to do.

He could not help admiring the persistence of her enduring faith in the eventual triumph of the good fairies, yet with the failure of every plan, he witnessed the spirit quenched within her. The heat of the city told upon her cruelly. She moved through her appointed tasks languidly. It was well for her that Mrs. Prouty knew of "Mr. Prince's" interest, and had in advance each week the rent of the "skylight" room which the two were keeping for the Princess—so Comfort explained to her. Though he had "gone to the country for the summer" (a mysterious enough arrangement if any one should ask Mrs. Prouty!) and held out no possibility of returning under her roof, Mrs. Prouty could but feel a wholesome respect, which amounted to reverence, for a young man who had, in cold blood and otherwise perfect condition, rented her second floor front without haggling! She had come to believe, indeed, that "Mr. Prince had private means"—and this view grew with each secretive announcement until it assumed proportions not unlike the truth.

It was the final vision of Comfort at the week-end which had decided Mollie Ogden that something must be done at once. The child's lassitude was

dangerous. Her big eyes were shadowed with circles; her face was transparently white, and the childish roundness had fallen quite away leaving painfully angular lines in her pathetic little figure.

"I am going to write to Katherine," she told Martin, simply, "I shall inclose it in one to Mammy." It was a plan that they had talked over before and Martin had thought unwise. His argument was the same now.

"You are placing your all on a slender chance," he said. "Mammy will either believe it a cruel trick and refuse to forward the letter or——"

"I think that she will know my handwriting."

"Then to forward it would be a still more cruel thing, for no written words could make Katherine understand such a silence—such a wrong done you both. 'Why a letter now, if not before?' she will reason, 'unless it is——'"

"Unless it be dictated by your necessity," she finished, sighing. They had been over the ground many times.

"I understand. It is true."

"In person, you could take her by storm, and her joy and love would get the better of her reason and give you a free hearing. It is the only hope. You must go to Mammy and find out where she is."

It was the final decision of Mrs. Ogden and he accepted the mission with a rueful smile. He had little hope of his presence in person moving the heart of the dusky virago who had sent back his pleading letter after it had been—quite evidently—read.

"I'll go," he said, ruefully, "but you may have to send out an expedition to discover my frozen body."

"It won't be frozen," laughed Mrs. Ogden. "It may be scorched to a crisp, however. I've seen Mammy in one of her towering rages when something seemed to threaten her loved ones. There is another chance," she added hopefully, "in the postmaster—for it is a tiny town, you know—and if you could ingratiate yourself with him, he might reveal the postmark of Mammy's letters."

It never occurred to any of those engaged in searching for the True Princess to employ the services of professionals, nor, to do them full honour, would they have entertained the notion for a moment. They were not seeking a fugitive from justice, but from injustice.

They took Fairy-godmother into their confidence, and her feverish excitement all but burned up the little remaining energy that she had. It was a dear

story of hope and comfort, however, that she whispered to Fairy-baby that night as she lay stifling in the little skylight room which marked the sole change in her life that Martin could persuade her to make.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT WAS a hot, weary, and discouraged prince at the end of a two days' quest in the sweltering, breathless village—a remnant of the old South. The scheme of propitiating the postmaster was dismissed at first sight of him. He was a crabbed and irascible pomposity of a former generation who at once looked askance at Martin's immaculate attire, and did not conceal his suspicion of the accent that at once proclaimed him a "No'th'nuh.'

And Mammy? Martin shuddered at the memory of the interview although he could not but laugh at his ignominious rout. He had the Northern inability to deal with the children of the dark-skinned race; and Mammy, perceiving her advantage, pressed it to the uttermost.

She did not seem in the least surprised at the visit from him. She had, apparently, been expecting it for some time.

"Ah knowed yo' all was a-comin' scallyhootin' down hyah expectoratin' me to tell yuh 'bout Miss Kath'in—but Ah ain' gwine do it, and yo' cain'

blastrate mah haid wif yo' triflin'. No, sah! You is maghty crafty, yo' No'th'n gemmens is—maghty crafty—but yo' cain' stagnate Mam' Liza—no, sah! Ah knows ye! Yo' takes mah baby—mah l'il Ma'y Lee—up thah an' yo' kills huh! Yass, sah—dat's what yo' does, an' then yo' tries to kill mah Miss Kath'in—comin' smifficatin' round hyah to fin' out whah she is! Hunh! Ef yo ain't dat Mahtin scallywag hisself yo' is his hi'ed man"—Martin jumped as her turban nearly waggled itself off in the sudden thrust into his face—"Hunh! HUNH! Ah reckon so! Gittin' yo'se'f up fit to kill, and honeyin' round wif yo' sweetnusses tryin' to get some'n outen Mam' Liza what she promise her Miss Kath'in she ain't gwine tell——"

"But——" Martin felt that something should stem the tide.

"Doan' yo' *but* me, young main! Ah'se gwine tell yo' what Ah thinks an' it ain't gwine be no honey cake lak yo-all's eithah! No, sah! Low-down Yankees, killin' one o' mah babies an' tryin' to steal th' otheh! Ain' yo' got no shame in yo' breast? Ain' yo' got not feah o' Gawd A'mighty?"

Her hands on her hips and her turban waggling, she was indeed enough to disconcert any one. Martin had never been talked to exactly in that way before.

He had had little experience with the plantation temperament, save that small aspect of it which showed white teeth when a coin was slipped into its hand. Here was something very different. Mollie Ogden had warned him not to offer Mammy money unless he wished to prejudice his case at once; but she had held out hope that flattery and kindliness would aid him. Mammy, however, was blacker than she had been painted.

"Yo' is a chile ob de Debbil—dat's what yo' is," she thundered at him; "de chile ob de Debbil, comin' projeckin' wif yo' evil spells. G'wan away from me, yo' man debbil!" she almost shrieked, raising her hand in imprecation—to such a pitch had her frenzy led her! "Doan' yo' ebber let me see yo' face again! Ah ain' gwine tell whah she am till Gabrul blow his trump—and de dead rise once mo'. No libbin' soul can mek me—man, wooman, chile, or—debbil!" The last was gasped our sepulchrally. Mammy was quite evidently moving even herself.

Holding his hat in his hand as he sought out the shady side of the street on his way back to the little old-fashioned hotel with its drawling proprietor, Martin mopped his brow, and experienced a sense of defeat that was entirely novel. It was not a pleasant feeling—but he forced himself to write

humorously the message which was to be wired to Mrs. Ogden:

Routed foot and horse. Will not yield information till Gabriel trumpets dead to life. Home to-morrow night.

C. E. M.

Much to his surprise a return telegram for him arrived:

Arrive to-morrow Moreyton 3:15. Meet Train. M. L. O.

Moreyton, he knew, was the nearest town, and within comfortable driving distance—for motor cabs were quite unknown in that vicinity. Leisurely he prepared to make the cool night drive to Moreyton. The slow-glancing proprietor of the hotel spat as he considered the question of being able to get him the necessary equipage.

"Why—yes, suh, I reckon we can get you all some so't of a tote ovah," he yielded finally, "though Lem's got th' cahriage. I could get yo' a hoss right easy. Yo' all cain ride, cain't yo'?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," Martin assured him, feeling pleasantly conscious that he was controlling himself wonderfully considering the wilting heat and urgements to exasperation, "but you see," half apologetically, "I didn't bring my riding togs with me."

The long-mustachioed proprietor stared at him a moment and then burst into a low, chuckling laugh.

"My Gawd!" he drawled in a sort of musical gurgle, "'ridin' tawgs!' Gem-men"—his expansive gesture included the entire office of drowsy laggards —"allow me to introdooce to you all a No'th'nuh who cain't ride to Moreyton because he"—the voice dropped impressively—"foh-got his ridin' tawgs!"

The joke was richly appreciated, yet in such hearty *camaraderie* were the drawling comments made that Martin felt they were laughing with him rather than at him and perforce joined in their mirth.

"But—my bag?" He raised his eyebrows humorously, fearful of creating further diversion.

"Strap it on yo' animul, suh." The proprietor had awakened to a real interest. "Hi, boy!"—summoning a loafing young darky comfortably garbed in the upper section of trousers and the lower section of shirt—"fetch a hoss hyah strawng enough to ca'y this gemman and a small valeese without breakin' its back!" With a flash of white teeth at the twinkling under the bushy brows, the young negro was off.

So it was that Martin rode to Moreyton that evening. He chuckled for the first time in many weeks as he loped along. He wished that Bland could see him now!

At first Martin refused point blank to have anything to do with Mollie Ogden's plan.

"You will simply frighten the poor, superstitious old soul into spasms," he protested, eying with ill favour the yards of white illusion through which her flushed and moist little face peered at him anxiously. Moreyton's tiny hotel parlour seemed floating with it!

"It is the only way left!" She unwound it with a determined little lift of the chin that he had grown to know well.

"It's inhuman, if, as you say, she really believes in spirits that return to earth——"

"It is inhuman to us all to stand between Katsie and those who mean most to her. . . . And Mammy is a tyrant. If she believed that it was best for my sister to be cut off from us, not even Katherine herself could move her. It would take a miracle; and I will be the miracle!"

"She will believe that you are a trick—an apparition conjured up by the 'debbil's chile' from the infernal regions—and you won't get your information," he challenged her half seriously.

"Listen!" There was a weird wailing, ventriloquial in effect, which became articulate in words spoken with exquisite intonation: "Liza, Mary Lee

has come back from the dead to be with Katherine —but she cannot find her."

Martin uttered an exclamation.

"You don't know that voice, of course," Mollie Ogden said softly. "That was my mother's. Mam' Liza will know it. You will know Fairy godmother's." The imitation was so perfect that he looked around despite his reason to see if a trick had not been played on him.

"It is marvellous," he confessed. "I had no notion that"—he paused—"that Mary Lee possessed such real talent." It was the first time that he had faced the name squarely and she liked him for it. "It is too perfect to play on a poor ignorant old negress, however. I—I can't bring myself to consent to working toward such a climax."

"I will never, never see any of you as long as I live." At the sobbing grief in the voice that he knew so well—words that Fairy-godmother had repeated to them both—beads of perspiration sprang out upon his forehead.

"Don't—don't," he muttered. "My God! Do anything—anything that will bring her back to us!"

With luggage left in Moreyton, ready for a midnight train back to New York, they determined to

retrace Martin's journey of the evening before, "'lighting" and leaving their horses hitched on the outskirts of the little town. Martin had avoided all suspicion of return by sending his mount back by a young negro that morning.

"When your fell purpose is accomplished, and you have found out where—she is, what do you purpose doing?" he had asked Mrs. Ogden as they urged their horses into the nearest approach to speed that they could muster.

"Rush back to New York, give a few instructions to the nurse about David, snatch Fairy-godmother, and make for the given address," she told him with the fire of excitement in her eyes.

It had been a ride fraught with deep meaning to both of them. With the woman beside him pointing out familiar objects and connecting them with the old life in the sleepy Southern village, the sweet-scented air became redolent of Katherine's childhood reminiscences, and more than once he completed her anecdote—to her delight—or added to the sum of them. Involuntarily he contrasted the somnolent simplicity and pastoral delights with the harsh turmoil of the metropolis from the moment that she had arrived upon her sad errand. No wonder that she had been utterly unable to cope with the moiling

seekers for place! Mary Ogden seemed to feel the tenor of his thought.

"I can never, never forgive myself," she whispered, misty eyed and trembling of lip. "I did not dream that Katsie would leave it all—that she would have nothing here to keep her from searching for me. I could not know how it would be!"

"No," comforted Martin as best he could, for his heart was sore with its own burden of remorse; "no, you could not know!"

It was marvellous moonlight when, keeping well to the outskirts of the village under Mollie's guidance, they reached Mammy's little cabin. It was not set in the heart of the negro colony—an unusual circumstance even as Mammy herself was unusual. On the contrary, it stood apart with its tiny plot of ground as behooved the dwelling of one who had been raised among "quality." On one side a line of bushes protected it from the dust of the road, and into these the stage director and leading actor of the little drama disappeared, leaving Martin suddenly with the words, "I'll be there at my cue, never fear."

The old darky was seated in front of the cabin, softly humming a weird melody as she rocked back

and forth in her rockerless chair. She manifested no surprise upon seeing Martin.

"Good evening, Mammy Liza," was his cheerful greeting.

"Howdy, Mistah Debbilman"; the opening clearly was not auspicious. "Yo' all back hyah agin?"

"I had a dream about you last night, Mammy Liza"—Martin forced his voice into a supernatural monotone, per instructions—"and I thought I ought to come back and tell you about it. You might change your mind."

"Ain' gwine change mah mind." This was definite.

"I thought that I saw you in heaven——"

"Hunh! Dat! Dat' so?" The interrogation scouted him with its intimations of vast scoffing incredulity. Martin went on serenely in the sing-song tone, standing negligently at ease:

"A very beautiful angel was talking to you—a lady who seemed to have known you well on earth." Mammy strove to keep the interest out of the glance she gave him: "Your Miss Alice was saying to you——"

"Miss Alice? Miss Alice? Huccome yo' know dat name, yo' Debill man? Tell me dat! Huccome yo' know dat it was mah Miss Al——?"

The pity within him rose as he saw the look of terror in Mammy's face, and Martin's heart overcame his instructions.

"Mammy Liza, your Miss Alice knows that I love her daughter and she is going to help me in any way that she can"—and in his heart Martin felt that he was perhaps speaking the truth if all could be known.

But with the slight veering to the plausible, he had lost his hold.

"Hunh!" It was the ultimate reach of scorn. "Hunh! If mah Miss Al done got anything to say to me she know whah Ah is. Yassah; an' she ain' gwine mek no fool No'th'nuh dream it. You heah what Ah say you—you——" But at a slight sound in the bushes Martin had disappeared.

Softly, musically, floating through the night air came the tones of a voice that brought the old darky to her feet shaking as with ague.

"Liza, you are keeping my child from those who love her! Mary Lee has come back—and you must tell her where my Katherine is!"

The negress clutched the jamb of her cabin door and swayed back and forth dizzily, but as she glanced about, she seemed to recover her courage.

"Sho," she muttered, "cain' fool ole Mam' Liza

with no projeckin'. Ah hearn tell ob debbils befo'." And then suddenly her black face seemed to turn gray and her eyes started from her head.

She fell trembling to her knees and began praying in a loud voice. Out from the glossy green of the bushes floated a white cloud—shimmering, misty in the silver moonlight—a cloud that seemed to melt away and reveal the figure of a young girl. In simple white she stood there reaching her arms toward the prostrate negress, two long braids hanging over her shoulders and about her throat a slender gold chain from which hung a locket that riveted Mammy's eyes as they caught sight of it.

"Mah baby!" she shrieked, "mah l'il Ma'y Lee!"

"Don't be afraid of me, Mam' Liza," the apparition soothed her. "I am coming back to life as soon as I can find Katherine. I had to come back, Mammy—for she is so lonely."

"Not to any libbin' soul—not to any libbin' soul," the trembling black woman was muttering to herself.

"But I am different," said the vision, "I have been dead so long! Mother wants you to bring her babies together, Mammy Liza. You are to tell me where Katherine is!" There was a real sob of pleading in the voice, for the emotional strain upon the apparition was no light matter.

Mammy broke out into wild wailing that threatened to arouse the neighbourhood and began fumbling with her turban.

"Ah got it hyah in mah haid," she kept mumbling between groans, "Ah got it hyah in mah haid!"

Finally she withdrew from its capacious folds a slip of paper, and in the moonlight the dashing chirography gleamed familiar. The vision advanced swiftly, gave Mammy Liza a very human and rapturous hug, and vanished into the bushes, leaving the old coloured woman standing there blinking fearfully at a shining little object that had mysteriously taken the place of the slip of paper in her hand.

It was a gold locket hung on the slenderest of chains!

Only too well she knew the clasp, and with trembling fingers she released the spring. There gazed up at her the lovely eyes that she had seen closed in the last sweet sleep and surcease from a weary, pain-riven world! She fondled it lovingly as she murmured with sobbing breath:

"Oh, Miss Al! Miss Al honey! Ah nebbah knowed dat yo' all was a-watchin' ober us all de time!"

CHAPTER XXV

TO KATHERINE WOODS—lonely, restless, and utterly wretched with the memories that she vainly strove to drive away with mad, unceasing work (gay, lilting love tales over which she smiled bitterly!)—the friendly, unquestioning city on the upper Mississippi had grown unbearable. Its beauty aroused in her longings that she could not stifle; its very friendliness seemed to offer her a stone when she was crying for bread. Despite its huge industries and great wealth, it was a city of home-loving folk with a kindly if careless interest in the stranger within their gates. Their attitude was in general a hybrid of Western hospitality and Eastern uncritical indifference.

Their very acceptance of those whom they knew not betrayed their self-sufficiency and an easy realization that every one else had an equal right to stand or fall unto himself alone. At first Katherine felt a grateful sense of security, but as time wore on the connection between a constantly snapping typewriter and the name that appeared in the July and August

numbers of popular magazines—so largely made up of fiction that even her efforts of spring came into use—suggested to the omnivorous consumers of light literature among whom she dwelt that they had a person of importance in their midst.

With her mind intent only upon her work she had not foreseen such a *contretemps*—nor could she have avoided it if she had—since, for excellent reasons, Carruthers and other editors to whom she had submitted her work urged against nom-de-plume signature from the first.

Very suddenly and unexpectedly she found herself a much-sought-after young woman. Under other circumstances, although her redundant modesty would at all times have felt ill at ease under the exaggerated tribute paid her simple talent, the attempts to lionize a mouse would have secretly amused her. Now, however, becoming known and identified with her work held a real menace.

She awoke one morning with the relieved feeling of having in her sleep arrived at a decision: she was leaving at once. As she flung her long braid back from her face with the accustomed weary gesture, she slipped her hand under the pillow and drew forth the watch whose ticking had comforted her dragging nights and days. Mechanically she allotted the

tasks of the day to the hours indicated upon its friendly face. Before the circuit should be made again she would be gone—whither she did not know, nor did she care, save that only the turmoil of a great city could hide her safely. In event of communications to forward, she would leave Mammy's address. That night she was on her way to Chicago.

Thus oddly at times do things happen in this work-a-day world of ours, where, unconscious of one another's plans, we defeat our own ends by the very freedom of our actions! Out of the darkness as Katherine's train thundered southward came the friendly hoot dying away in a wail that betokened an approaching iron comrade. Clacking over the rails they passed each other, and as Fairy-godmother stirred in her sleep, half aroused by the unaccustomed sound, Mollie Ogden laid a quieting, comforting hand upon the child's shoulder and pulled farther apart the heavy green curtains for a more generous supply of the air that grew gratefully cool as they whirled northward.

Mrs. Ogden dismissed the taxicab in front of the house whose address was on the slip of paper in her purse, and Fairy-godmother fairly danced up to the door in wild anticipation. She had been counting the hours—and, since they entered

the cab at the hotel, the minutes—that would elapse before she saw her Princess in the flesh again. Albeit she was more controlled, Mollie Ogden was no less excited, and over and over again she had rehearsed the scene upon which they were entering. The Scandinavian maid who admitted them seemed to have no notion of the person wanted until they had repeated the name several times. Then she announced blankly that she would see Mrs. Conroy.

It was Mrs. Conroy, wholesome and sweet of face, who told them. Indeed, Miss Woods had been with her—many weeks—but she had left the night before for the East. A yawning blackness suddenly engulfed them.

Fairy-godmother's head drooped swiftly as the bloom of a flower wilts mysteriously upon its slender stalk. Mary Ogden again felt the chill of the icy fingers that she had come to believe were the talons of her Nemesis. Was she always to be too late? Quite composedly, however, she asked if no address had been left. Mrs. Conroy brightened in the womanly desire to be of help. They seemed so disappointed, poor dears! Yes, indeed, she had left an address by which she could at any time be reached, and quite unconscious of the blow that she was dealing, Mrs. Conroy recited cheerfully *Mammy's* state

and town and lock box. Even Fairy-godmother knew that this was almost worse than none, and Mary Ogden realized that her ghostly trick might be played once but not twice.

They were at the exact point of progress at which they had been when she had instructed Martin to enter upon the mission to Mammy Liza! She looked at Fairy-godmother, and her heart ached. Full well she realized that the child had kept up on the stimulus of hope alone; what would happen now she did not dare to think. The trip back must not be begun until they had had some slight opportunity to rest, for, with the hope in ashes, it would prove interminably tedious, if it did not indeed eat up the remainder of the slender strength. Comfort fought the delay with pleadings and the tears of weakened self-control, so a compromise of one day was effected, Mrs. Ogden making reservations with forethought of a longer delay in Chicago unless the child took heart. The loss of Katherine had, for the time, seemed swallowed up in a very present and acute anxiety: she feared that Fairy-godmother would never reach New York.

"I suppose," ventured the clerk at the modest and rather stuffy little hotel in Chicago whose eminent

respectability had been its only lure for Katherine, "that you wouldn't consider taking an apartment off somebody's hands for a fortnight or so?" Katherine hesitated, and he went on cheerfully: "Once in a while folks that want to be gone for a vacation or like that list their places with us because nobody but nice people comes here—the kind that they'd be willing to trust with their things. I've had quite a lot of guests fill in that way when they got tired of hotel living. This is a bully cool apartment and you can have it for just the bare rent of the place empty—right near the lake, too."

"Why, yes," agreed Katherine listlessly. "I'll go anywhere where it is cool—and quiet for work."

"Coolest and quietest place anywhere around," he asseverated, handing her the address. "Might go and have a look at it, anyway."

"Oh, I'll take your word for it," she said with a wan little smile. "It doesn't make much difference—for two weeks."

"Poor kid," said the clerk to himself as he made the necessary arrangements for her (there was something about Katherine Woods which had always compelled chivalry!). "Love, prob'ly. Southerner, too. 'Ah'll take yo' wohd'"; he smiled as he quoted. "Somebody's a damn fool!"

So it was that Katherine Woods emerged from her cab and superintended the transference of her bags thence to the elevator of a handsome apartment house just as a small, plump laddy broke loose from his nurse and, with a rapturous shriek, rushed into the arms of a merry-faced, prosperous young business man who was courteously waiting the singling out of the freight and passenger elevator luggage.

"Daddy!" High in the air went the fat, wriggling legs and Sonny Boy was seated upon a broad shoulder as the elevator boy announced, sure of sympathetic ears:

"He's ben a-ridin' up and down with me foh fifteen minutes, waitin' foh yo'."

Katherine smiled involuntarily into the eyes that held the proud light of fatherhood and an answering twinkle met them. As he stalked off the lift at his floor, he looked thoughtfully reminiscent. . . . Where had he seen that girl before? Surely he knew those eyes. He would ask Bettykins who the dickens she was. A dull thud on the floor above betokened without a doubt what apartment she belonged in—the elevator boy did not seem to care whether the bags burst open or not.

"Bettykins," however, had just been informed by the distressed servant that the ices had not arrived for

dinner—clearly that was no time to inquire about a maiden with wistful eyes. Besides, John Carruthers Ames had several toys which had to be mended all at once.

As for Katherine, much more important things happened at once to absorb her attention. She had already wired for Mammy Liza, who when the message arrived was vainly struggling with the stub of a pencil in the effort to force her orthography into describing accurately her wonderful vision. In delighted anticipation of the visit No'th, she abandoned her strivings with the futilities of letters of the alphabet; she would wait until she could tell Miss Kath'in all about it, and show her the locket as proof that would rout skepticism.

The dire perils of travel had been eased by Katherine's explicit directions in the letter that followed hard upon the telegram, and her generous purse had made discomfort for the old negress impossible. Yet Mammy was much worn by the unaccustomedness of a journey, and the blissful hours following her arrival she spent in attempting to realize the fact that people could live in a "layah cake" without the slightest knowledge of or interest in each other.

To Mammy, it seemed impossible that these who lived under one roof should not form a community

of interests that verged in intimacy upon the social relations of a large, devoted family. Within a few hours she was making important discoveries about the neighbours—for her expansive friendliness won her consideration, and her turbaned head gained her distinction where all other occupants of the building blurred into the background, regardless of station. As soon as she roundly boxed the ears of the grinning young negro who ruled the ups and downs of the elevator, there was established an *entente cordiale* between them that nothing could sever. Moreover, she at once made friends with a small masculine toddler in white who confided to her that he was "Jonkwuss Sames" and was going to the "wake" in the "choo-choo."

That night after Mammy put things to rights following her Miss Kath'in's slight but deliciously prepared meal, she felt that the silence of the typewriter keys betokened an auspicious moment for disclosure of her secret. For many days the fashion of its telling had caused her anxiety. If her dear young lady did not believe! She found Katherine in the screened-in porch room silently gazing over the lights of the city with an expression in her face that swiftly changed as she heard Mammy's voice. Too late Katherine became aware of her, however—

for the longing and pain of utter weariness of worldly things in her unconscious pose had smitten the old coloured woman clean to the soul.

"Miss Kath'in, honey," she began, yearningly, "Ah'se got some'n to tell yo' dat'll be mighty fine listenin'."

Katherine smiled: "I'll be glad to hear it, Mammy Liza. It has been a long while since I have heard anything that was mighty fine listening. Sit down here by me and tell me all about it." A sudden thought drove the blood to her cheek. "Only—I warn you, Mammy—no intercessions for—anybody. If you have had visitors to ask of me, I—I don't want to hear about them—please."

She did not speak the truth, and, intuitively, Mammy knew it. If she had poured out her heart, she would have confessed that night and day, despite her arguments, her ridicules, her scathing denunciations of what she was pleased to call her "weakness," she felt a consuming hunger for the sound of a vibrant voice and low, teasing laugh; the sight of clear, kind eyes (that somehow shot with a tiny flame when she was near); and the touch of a smooth, strong hand. The complete truth, had she voiced it, would have flung out passionately that she did not dare to hear of his search for her, lest, with this salve

to wounded pride, she would strive to find a way to exonerate him, to argue an excuse to return to him.

Nor of Fairy-godmother did she dare to think, for she was indissolubly bound with the prince of the fairy tale that had come to naught. As her spirit as well as her body drew farther and farther away from the acute blinding pain of that terrible morning, she saw the child's part so clearly; she yearned over the wounds that her swift, unreasoning passion had inflicted upon the tender heart; she recognized that hers was not the only house of dreams which had come tumbling down! Yet, in forgetfulness of her own childish sorrows (perhaps because these had been few and fleeting), she fancied that Comfort's wounds were now but scars, and that the fairy prince had more than made up to her the loss of the princess. It was bitter—this thought—and then she smiled at its bitterness. Why should she care if a child forgot?

Yet now it was with a heart that cried out in protest against the words even as she spoke them that she repeated to Mammy Liza:

"Nothing about those who have come to search for me, for that would not be fine listening. It would only hurt me to remember."

"Lawsee, honey," said Mammy—ever literal as

far as words were concerned; "dat doan 'count sperrits, does it?"

Katherine smiled in genuine amusement at the anxiety of the tone.

"No. Have you had heavenly visitants, Mammy?"

Excitement mingled with awe trembled in Mammy's rich, deep contralto: "Ah sho has, honey! Ah sho has!"

The girl would not have admitted the sense of disappointment which stole over her as she thus discovered the trend of the "fine listening"; instead, she determined to give Mammy's superstitious maunderings a respectful hearing.

Just at what point in the story the attention of the listener suddenly focussed upon the narration rather than the narrator, she could not afterward determine. The vivid dramatic recital in the exotic fashion peculiar to the dusky race held her breathless and palpitating for the *dénouement.* No mention had Mammy made of any save the vision that had emerged from the cloud upon the summons of the heavenly voice; and at the vanishing of the form again into the bushes, Katherine drew a long, quivering breath as of one brought back to reality after a flight into the realms of blissful imagination.

"It was a very lovely dream, Mammy," she said

softly. "I have dreamed of—Mollie, too—very often; but my night visions do not have the happiness nor vividness of yours. Always I am seeking her in the dark; always she is just escaping me."

"Dream nuffin!" shouted the old negress. "Dream nuffin! Does yo' all reckon Ah'se gwine come up hyah miles and miles to tell yo' 'bout a dream? Ain't Ah always had concirspection 'bout such t'ings?" Her voice lowered, pleading. "Does yo' reckon Ah'se gwine bombast yo' hopes dat-a-way? Look a hyah, honey! Dis am what she done guv me: lef' it in mah hand w'en she took the papah. Does yo' reckon a dream would leave a sho-'nuff locket?"

Bewildered, Katherine took the trinket and mechanically released the spring to look into her mother's eyes. "Mollie always wore it around her throat," she said, a chill creeping over her as if a breath of cold air had come to them. "I—I don't understand. Where could it have come from; where —where?" Hope sprang up within her despite her reason.

"She say she gwine lib again," the negress chanted. "She gwine fin' yo' all—dat's what yo' ma say—and come to keep yo' from gittin' lonesome. Dat what she say; dat what she'll do."

Suddenly Katherine sprang to her feet and began pacing back and forth the little room excitedly.

"Mammy, Mollie is alive! I know it! I feel it! Never—never would she have given this locket to any one else. Mollie herself came to you and she is trying to find me. I don't understand, but I know that it is true. Oh, Mammy! we shall not have to wait and search and grieve any longer." She hugged the corpulent form close.

"Hunh! 'Twawnt no live body come to see me," murmured the old woman obstinately. "'Twawnt no live body dat talk like yo' ma outen a cloud. Sho! 'Speck yo' all would try to figger out dat it was one ob de Isrulites, 'tendin' he was Gawd A'mighty dat done talk to Moses outen de bushes. No, suh! Cain' fool Mam' Liza. Dey was a voice —yo' own mothah's voice, chile—honey; and den de vision!"

"But the locket, Mammy! The locket is as real as real! You see a real live person must have put that in your hand. It's Molly's own locket!"

The turban rose in majesty to top Mammy's full height. "Does yo' all reckon dat One what could turn de water—plaines' kind o' rain water—into de fines' kind o' wine, cain't mek a little no-'count locket like dat ef He done got de pattern in His House?"

"Listen, Mammy." Katherine tried hard to curb her impatience. "Did the—vision—take away the address that I wrote for you?"

"She sho' did. Ah had it right in mah——"

"Yes, yes, I know. If it was Mollie," she mused with a thrill at the words of it, "she would surely follow it up at once. If she wrote, of course the letter would be forwarded to you and then finding her would be simple. But there is just a chance—the merest chance—that she went in person. I am going to wire Mrs. Conroy this address after all."

There was a return message from that estimable woman, much to Katherine's surprise. It informed her that there had been a lady and a little girl, giving the name of Ogden, who had been there and had immediately returned to the East, leaving no address.

Katherine read with a heart that was nigh to bursting. The name, Ogden, made her assurance doubly sure. The identity of the little girl did not even enter as a matter of interest. Molly had been there. Mollie had travelled God knows how far to find her, only to meet with disappointment and a clue that sent her back to Mammy's door. More than that; whatever had kept Mollie from letting herself be

known during all these years might now appear again to keep her from returning thither.

Worn out by the strain of wild hope that ended in utter despair, she crept into Mammy's arms and sobbed out her anguish of desolation upon the capacious breast, childwise. Her grief was the greater because joy had entered only to leave the darkness more hopelessly impenetrable by reason of its sudden blinding light. Had Mammy spoken one word to associate Martin in any way with the appearance of the vision—although to be sure Mammy herself saw no connection between the two—her despair would have submerged all the jagged reefs of pride with which she fended off each white-winged truant thought that sped from Love's boundless ocean to seek the harbour of her wistful soul.

But Mammy was obedient as only one born in serfdom can be obedient—and Katherine had forbidden mention of Martin's name. So the negress travelled back again to the sweltering little village to sit outside her cabin of an evening and watch with prayerful eyes for a vision that never came again.

CHAPTER XXVI

HOT and dusty and weary was the return to Chicago for Mollie Ogden and Fairy-godmother though they had again chosen the night trip for the promise it held of grateful moments of cool respite. After sleepless hours in which she tried to soothe Comfort's feverish little body into a semblance of repose, Mollie Ogden knew that she did not dare to push mercilessly into the great heat under which New York was then laid prostrate. Perhaps a day or so at the breezy hotel on the lake front which she had selected in Chicago would bring back the intrepid spirit to further resist the bad fairies, and restore the roses to Fairy-godmother's cheeks. With well-simulated gayety she made plans for a week's stay there, sending on the address to Martin and the faithful nurse who was attending to David.

Fairy-godmother, however, showed only a polite interest. It seemed as if the struggle to make anything appear of sufficient consequence to discuss was too great, and she fell back into listlessness after a quiet acquiescence in everything that was suggested.

In vain Mrs. Ogden strove to arouse her toward the expiration of their stay: it was only after the direct appeal in which the necessity of getting back to little David was put foremost, that the child, by an almost superhuman effort, brought into play all her reserve energy and asserted a desire to get back at once.

"The Princess might of gone right back to Stepmother's and they're keeping it for a s'prise," she invented, with a feigned zest, for she herself had come to believe that the fairies had succeeded in estranging her princess from them forever.

"And the Prince will be wanting to see us," her companion added with forced brightness in an endeavour to induce the child's thought into channels that promised fulfilment of desire.

The light of love sprang up in the sad eyes.

"Dear big Prince!" she murmured. "Don't you think that he wants the Princess most of all?"

"I believe that he does," whispered Mollie Ogden with an odd little ache in her heart, and her gaze far away.

"It seems queerish," began the child thoughtfully, "that she would stay away from him when she knew it was the Prince. It isn't as if it was just from me —or you"—for the unquestioning mind had not thoroughly understood the whole matter of relation-

ship involved. "It's because he's the Prince—and they b'long." She followed her own thoughts silently for an instant and then the tired little voice took them up aloud; "If you knew that somebody trooly-rooly b'longed, you wouldn't not let him find you, would you?"—with a beautiful disregard for negatives; "'speshully if you knew that it hurt?"

"No," said Mollie Ogden, and then a sudden realization came to her—a readjustment of values in the light of the big, clear eyes that rested for a thoughtful moment in the depths of hers as if searching her very spirit. "No, Fairy-godmother," she said very humbly. "I should try not to hurt him if I were sure that he belonged."

Somehow the words conjured up a vision of a fine rugged profile, cameo-cut, against a gloom of dark houses drawn up like a line of gigantic soldiers.

It was just at this point that Fate appeared in the not-unaccustomed guise of a bell boy with a message.

Mollie Ogden perused it again and again before she could quite seem to grasp its significance. It was from Carruthers, and her dulled sense did not even marvel that it should be he who sent it. From the crisp wording she filled in the facts: David had been struck by a motor car—they hoped not seriously hurt, but it was best for her to come at once. He had also

wired Ames, his brother-in-law, to put himself at her service in every way. Mechanically she read it aloud to wondering Fairy-godmother, too dazed herself to consider the possible effect upon the sensitive sympathies and high-strung temperament of the child. Nor did she, indeed, despite her anxiety, realize that for many days Fairy-godmother's dauntless will alone had kept in her worn little body the semblance of her accustomed vitality. . . . The shock of the words that sprang at once into living realities painted with gigantic strokes upon the imagination of the child of Art's own bearing, snapped some slender thread within her, and for a moment the spirit escaped from the bonds of the flesh.

As Mrs. Ogden looked up from the tersely worded message she was formulating to Carruthers, she discovered that Fairy-godmother had quietly slid to the floor, unconscious.

The young physician, who was summoned at once from his rooms in the hotel, looked grave and explained it all in rather technical language; it seemed to mean somehow a starvation of cell tissues because food, taken under certain mental conditions, does not nourish the body, and Nurse Sleep deserts her post, and the will to live is laggard. There was a dangerous state of exhaustion and the child must not, at

the peril of snapping again that slender thread forever, be moved farther than to a hospital. He recommended an excellent sanatorium at which the white-faced, anxious woman shuddered, with all the horror of a person in health, and openly rebelled.

"I'm sure," she said definitely, trying to hold herself upon the thought of the matter in hand and put the agonizing news or the message out of her mind for a moment, "that she will never recover under such circumstances. She is very sensitive to atmospheres, a dreamer, and introspective to an extreme. To be entirely surrounded with suggestions of illness would be the worst possible thing for her."

The young physician shrugged. After all, it was not really his case, and he could do no more than express an opinion. (Women are obstinate, once they accept a notion!) He must refuse, however, to attend the child further if his orders were not followed implicitly. That was the long and short of it —and the sensitive child was unmistakably in a dangerous condition. He put it courteously, of course, but quite clearly.

Her spirit rent with anxiety and indecision, Mollie Ogden did the one thing that she could do. She called Woodford Ames upon the telephone and explained the situation to him. She was obliged to

leave Fairy-godmother: that was clear. The case seemed to her not to call for a hospital or a sanatorium unless one could be found less institutional than that which the young physician had suggested. The treatment seemed to be the natural methods of proper food and care, with massage and utter rest—the sort of thing that a nurse could manage excellently. Did he know of one well recommended by his own physician and was there a country place or a suburb where possibly they might find a quiet spot for her charge to recuperate?

With Carruthers's message open before him, Ames let his big heart go out to her in her extremity. He had a solution at once: Betty and small Jack were "up at the lake" and he himself was going to be at the club during the time of their stay. The maid was at the apartment, which was big and cool and comfortable for the nurse and the little girl until the latter was well enough to move, or until she—Mrs. Ogden—could return and find a place more to her liking. Meanwhile, he would keep an eye on her and report progress—to add assurance to the doctor's professional reports; and, by the way, he would have their own physician send out a capital nurse. If she said the word, he would have the car right around to the hotel and take them out there.

It was the sort of thing that John Carruthers himself would have done, Mrs. Ogden felt with a sudden loosening of the tension about her heart. So with tears choking her voice she thanked Ames and accepted his kindness.

Fairy-godmother herself silently received the decisions as they were made known to her. Her heavy lids drooped over the weary eyes and she let them do with her what they would.

The effort of her faint, "Give my love to Davy, and —Prince," quite exhausted her. Too long had she drawn upon that hoard of precious golden strength which Nature hides away in the recesses of our body to be opened, as a last resource, under the magic sesame of hope!

It was thus that she bade good-bye to Mrs. Ogden in the spacious, airy apartment to which Woodford Ames's car had so carefully driven them. The child's white face, clearly lustrous as alabaster, brought the blinding tears to the brown eyes as Mollie engaged in a last consultation with the plump and pretty nurse. Had she not paused for that last word before she announced that she was ready to be driven to the train, she had caught sight of a wistful-eyed, bubbly-haired girl being lifted in the rather ornate cage to the floor above.

As it was, mingled with the anguished fear of ill tidings that might meet her at the end of her journey, was a sickening sense of defeat in the heart of the woman who stared at the scenery unseeingly while she reviewed the quest that had taken her away from her boy.

Martin was for going to the child at once when he heard, but Mrs. Ogden, pale with sleepless travelling and a night of watching at the bedside of her boy, advised against it.

"Hold out the prospect of a visit as a treat—a reward," she told him. "It will work wonders with her, and mean more than your going now. It might upset the careful regimen which the nurse has imposed."

So, instead, he scoured the shops for fairy tales, and sent her letters which he illustrated with a charming fantasy and delicious humour. His instructions to the nurse were simple: her patient was to have all she wanted, regardless of expense. At last Fairy-godmother had come into her own! To Martin, feeling that all things had come to a sudden end in regard to Katherine, this charge of Fairy-godmother was a relief. It gave outlet to his mental energy to lay the plans for her future and granted a dear respite

to his pain to occupy his mind with her possible present pleasure. Mrs. Ogden he had seen but the once when he had run up to the country place where she had, in a feeling of such security, ensconced David. He found that all man could do Carruthers had done, and wisely he left it so, yet a queer feeling of unutterable loneliness stole over him.

Then came an odd thing—odd, that is, when one has no real depth of notion of human nature. In this yearning for human companionship he did not seek out the men of his own rather undemocratic estate who were left in town, nor did he fly to the usual haunts of pleasure seekers. Far from it. It chanced that Cricket was having a vacation, and he was quite as much surprised as was Martin himself that the latter should bag him and carry him off to Martindale. Yet that fortnight there sprang up between them one of those rare friendships which can exist only where two have tried each other's mettle first (often it is foemen's steel!) and found it true. Apparently there was nothing upon which they were agreed: their tastes in books, in art, in music, differed widely; they ridiculed each other's pet form of athletics unmercifully. It appeared that even their methods in fishing were quite

at variance. Yet beneath the surface of things was an invisible bond: all differences—hard, unyielding things they are at times—grew soft and pliable in the refining fire of manhood's uttermost love, and became hoops of steel wherewith they were bound to each other.

These were the days when Mollie Ogden, sitting at the bedside of her boy, came to know the wisdom of the silence, that neither explains nor seeks explanation. It was not a time for nice balancing of obligation; for the grudging affection which says in effect: "Thus far will I go if thou do come to me." If indeed she understood at last the real reason for Carruthers's silence, she gave no sign. Unless the merciless demands that she made upon him evidenced the will to place herself utterly in his debt.

A boyish eagerness to serve her, to relieve her, to bear the burden of her moods of despair at the end of the first days when the boy's life seemed like to snuff out before dawn came, possessed him.

To the man, too, came the realization of the tense demands life would always make upon this passionate, rebellious, half child—half woman—with her heritage of the almost bitter pride of the South and her absorbing tenderness where she loved. How

feebly were even the needs of the past few days met with the limitless purse! And life, full of beauty and ugliness, full of pain and pleasure, stretched before her, for she was beautiful and young.

He remembered the simple words in which it came to him: "I could not have lived through it without you; David is all that I have!" Side by side they fought for his life, and they won. This night he had come up from town to make sure that she "went to sea for a breath of fresh air," he said. It meant riding like mad to arrive in the deepening dusk—for the trains were abominably timed—and racing in like manner far into the usual hours of his post-midnight rest. She knew it, yet sighed with relief when her faint expostulations were met with smiling obstinacy.

"The boy is being excellently well taken care of now—he has nurses and physicians no end; but you?" He shook his shaggy head at her. "Woman, you are using upon these professional seekers after ailments that remarkable histrionic ability of yours to such an extent that you have them—the whole pack and parcel of them—utterly deceived. They don't know that your nerves utterly gave way this morning and that you wept—over nothing at all, I'll wager—this afternoon." It was a long shot and in the dark but

he saw by her guilty start that he had not hit wide of the mark.

"Now, in lieu of a pleasure yacht, we'll climb aboard that foolish, leaden, creaky old row boat down there and I'll show you the muscle of the man that made the college crew famous!"

The domineering spirit in him strengthened her as it always had. She could not imagine how a failure could live near John Carruthers and not take heart, or else slink away in very shame. To her he was a tonic; no other man had ever seemed to call her very soul forth at the sound of the clarion. In the masterfulness of others she had felt always merely the sounding brass or the tinkling cymbal.

"You're a bully," she murmured tauntingly, letting herself be swept along to the beach; "you're a bully, and you are egotistical, and—if I were not tired I should think up other things about you!"

"I could think up detestable things no end about you," he retorted, struggling to launch the antique craft, "but I am too instinctively chivalrous." He was in high good humour.

Then—possibly because she was weary, possibly because she had had odd bits of time to ponder (so futile is our thinking oft times!) over things that were past—the words leaped out ere she could stop them:

"You would not have to think them up; that sort of thing would come, ready made, to hand if one were familiar with skimming newspaper files." She was horror-struck at the ill-timed, bitter candour of it as the phrases swept forth from unguarded lips.

He paused, looking out to sea for a moment, and she stood in cold stillness hearing the sound of her voice reverberate about her. Suddenly he saw himself through her eyes, explained his own silence in her terms, even visioned her as she must have fancied he had looked upon her since he knew. Though words may be translated into the tongues of all the nations of men, silences may be interpreted only by each soul in the language known to itself alone!

Could she have fancied him that sort of a cad? Yet was he better or worse than that in fearing to defy the torments of his own pride—where hers had been ruthlessly torn down; dreading the possible comment of a thoughtless, chattering mob for himself when he held in such little account its estimate of her? It was a real moment pregnant with self-questionings and rich in its decisions for both of them.

"When you and I put out to sea, little mother-girl," he said simply, letting his eyes rest in hers, "there will be a crew of three—but no cargo of past memories to weight us down. Come!"

It held infinite meaning for her—that word of his; it was the summons first of all that she heard, and her heart leaped out to meet it; it was the magic sound at which the shackles forged in the headlong passion of the past fell from her. Yet withal it held, despite its imperiousness, a condition; there must be no cargo! He knew her moods; it was almost a promise that he was exacting.

She went to him, and, tremulous with weariness, leaned against him simply, as a little child.

"I will forget," she said, lifting her eyes to his. "Dearest of all the world, take me, and help me to forget!"

CHAPTER XXVII

ONLY a week had passed, but it seemed to Fairy-godmother as if she and the pretty nurse, whom she had named "Snow White," had been shut up in the castle a long, long time. She lay by the window and during the last two hours of the morning, hours after the visit of "Big Bear," the physician that Woodford Ames had sent to them, she would watch the children across the street decorously playing under the chaperonage of their white-capped nurses. It was a small park with a sufficient amount of shade to lend itself to gossip and an exchange of complaints, so the youngsters were allowed untrammelled liberty during the mornings. The fact that Fairy-godmother soon wearied of watching them in itself argued ill, and her increasing listlessness was reported each day to the physician, with anxious eyes. Martin's letters held her longest, the nurse told him, but of late she was content to lie with them under her cheek, unread.

"I can't unnerstand," she said to Snow White, pathetically; "th' words crumble up so!"

"It is utterly impossible to hold her attention by reading, although Mr. Martin has sent a carload of fairy tales," reported the nurse. "The complete thought of a sentence, even, does not reach her. As she says, the 'words crumble up' without meaning!"

The physician shook his head. "She is an odd bit of psychology," he sighed and smiled together. "We're not deep enough—yet."

"If she were older," said the nurse. "I should say that she was slowly dying of a broken heart. Behold, O Master, how unscientific I have grown!" she added, half laughing.

The wise old man patted her shoulder encouragingly. "My child, be as unscientific as you like, so you follow my orders," he smiled. "You may discover one of these days that science is in its infancy when it comes to diagnosing conditions of the human mind."

There was a cool, strong breeze from the east that day—fitful, to be sure, yet with none of the enervating odours of hot walls and sidewalks or dust-laden trees scorched beneath the merciless sun. Comfort, weaker than she had ever been at all, made no comment as the Big Bear and Snow White moved her into a room which had not been in use

since they had taken the apartment. The nurse had demurred a bit at the change for she told Big Bear that it was tremendously noisy.

"She can stand the noise if she has this refreshing breeze," was the prompt decision—though he made a wry face at the hub-bub which arose from the street as the constant procession of motors wended their way hither and yon, and at a flimsy bit of popular dance music (brilliantly played by hands that might have wrought fairer things had they chosen) which floated in at the open window. Beneath it all was a steady rhythmic clicking which they did not notice at all!

A letter had come that morning from Martin which the child held under her cheek until she was "resteder," and one from Mollie Ogden lay beside her on the table. The coolness crept in about her like tender hands as she lay in her pretty new room.

Exhausted with the effort of replying to the doctor's few brief questions and adjusting herself to new surroundings, she dozed with eyes half shut. Her thoughts, nebulous things always, were less able than usual to form clearly. Davy was better; Mrs. Ogden was coming—the nurse had told her that many times, omitting the unnecessary information that the physician had given orders for the

telegram that she herself had sent East. Davy—the Prince—she had drifted back to Mrs. Prouty's and was finding the dishes so heavy to lift! Besides, there was a roar of water in the pan—and Stepsister was playing and it hurt her head. But the fairies were there in the sunbeam across the floor. They had hold of hands and were dancing about her. More than that—they were talking to her in odd, high-pitched, snapping little voices.

The nurse saw her lips moving. She was not resting in sleep. It was well that Mrs. Ogden was coming back. There were bad signs—the pulse. . . . The nurse resolutely took her mind away from the pulse as if by considering it she should stop its beat altogether. Oh, if those incessant noises would only stop! It had been a mistake not to take the child to a hospital at once! They had had no notion it would go like this! If she were not roused to an interest within the next twenty-four hours. . . . Comfort opened her eyes.

"It's the fairies!" she said, quite clearly, to the nurse.

"Of course, dear," said the nurse, not at all clearly.

"They've got her. They told me so just now," faint as the voice was, it had an energy that had not

been there for many days. "Listen!" The nurse listened and heard the hum of traffic afar and the screech of motors anear. The piano had stopped playing—thank heaven!

"They sound angry, but they aren't!"

"No, indeed; they are not in the least angry. They are very nice fairies, I should say—fairies that will sing you to sleep if you will let them. You were dreaming, dear. Now go to sleep again."

"I brought them out of the dream," she insisted, weakly—listening. "Oh, please, Snow White, can't you hear them?" This was no fever of delirium and Snow White listened. She pushed back the ivory rings on the chintz curtains so that they would not click together softly in the breeze; and then she heard the fairies!—heard them so distinctly that she wondered she had not heard them before.

"It is some one writing on the typewriter in the apartment above, dear," she said gently. "Does it bother you much?"

"It is the Princess," the colour swept back into her cheeks and her eyes were bright. "They told me!" She listened tensely. "No-o, I don't unnerstand them now, but they told me a li'l minnit ago. We'll resker her!" The tone was faint but triumphant.

"Of course we will," cheerily. "Now—go to sleep, so that you will be strong for the rescue."

Fairy-godmother obediently closed her eyes, and Snow White, who felt jubilant indeed, was so crassly ignorant that she was not even mystified by the conversation! They had told her of the child's love for fairy lore. If the click of typewriter keys meant fairies to her, so much the better!

"Click-click-click-click!" Why, she could see the Princess sitting before it in a dull skylight room with a pile of loose sheets flung about on the couch! "Click-click-click!" If the fairies would only come again and tell her how to get to her! Snow White had seemed to know where she was, too! Somehow the flash of strength that had come to her was oozing away, and she had a queerish feeling of going out through the top of her head. Suppose she should not be able to get back into it again by the time the Princess needed her! Snow White was giving her something that made a funny feeling in her wrists and she found herself "back in again" in a jiffy. There was an odd crinkle in her eyes and Snow White seemed very far away, but her voice was tremendously loud in her ear and the fairies had begun shrieking "Quick! Quick! Quick!" Then she saw Snow White quite clearly and her voice was

very soft and low and she understood what she was saying. Moreover, she found that she could talk, too.

"You must go quick," she said. "Tell her that she must come!" The nurse looked bewildered. "I'll go out through the top of my head again! Listen! Quick! Quick! Run, Snow White!"

Never was Snow White in such a quandary with any of her patients! Yet the child was in earnest and it would be dangerous to thwart her or put her off. She had a miraculous flash of strength after each dose of the stimulant yet the reaction. . . . Surely whoever it was—man or woman that was hammering away—would understand! The appeal of childhood was universal. With a glance at her patient to reassure herself that she had time to seek out the fairies, she sped to the elevator and held it for their return as she rang the bell of the apartment above.

Katherine Woods faced her, amazed. The nurse was pretty and troubled and very much in earnest though a bit incoherent.

"Will you be good enough to come with me to see my patient in the apartment just below yours? It's a little girl who—well, we are hoping of course to bring her through but we are not sure," she choked,

and the astonishment in Katherine's eyes died away in complete and tender understanding.

"Of course I will come," she said simply. "You may tell me more about it as we go down."

There was time only for a hasty explanation: the little girl had heard the typewriter—(Katherine was mighty sorry; she had had no idea)—Oh, it was not that in the least; quite the contrary. The little thing had the notion that it was fairies talking and she wanted to see. . . . Children were like that—— (Ah, Katherine knew only too well!) It was this way—the room just below that in which she had been working. . . .

The apartment was shadowy, for the heat of the light had been shut out since the cool of the morning, but Katherine had a vague memory of Mammy's telling her that a little boy lived here. Perhaps she had misunderstood Mammy. She had reached the room that the nurse had indicated by slipping in ahead of her, and she heard the quiet, soothing voice say:

"I've brought her to you, dear, so that you may see for yourself that she is not a fairy. Come in!"

Katherine entered slowly and smiling in cheery fashion. A white slip of a child lay there, her worn little body outlined in all its angularity beneath the

single covering, and her large eyes seeming to shine out of the pillow in weird, burning brilliancy. With the faint glad cry from the pale lips, Katherine Woods threw herself on her knees beside the bed and gathered close the wasted form.

"Fairy-godmother!" the sobs choked her utterance. "What does this mean?'

But Fairy-godmother, alone of the three, felt nothing strange in it all: something seemed to steal through her—warm and sweet and infinitely her own.

"There *are* fairies!" she whispered contentedly. "They told me!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

FROM the wonderful morning of the coming of the Princess, to the magic night when, laughing and weeping and murmurously clinging together, her two godchildren witnessed to her fairy power in the joy of their reunion, life seemed to come to Fairy-godmother in marvellous iridescent waves that changed the whole world.

Now she was at peace with all the fairies for she had broken the evil spell.

"Sometimes," she admitted to her dear Princess, "it was hard b'lieving that any of them was on my side 'tall."

She never quite understood why the Princess hid her face in the slender little neck, which was beginning already to lose the shadowy hollows, and whispered, as if to herself, a great many words—of which the only one that Comfort heard at all was "forgive."

Snow White had been dismissed, with real tears at parting, for she had grown very fond of her small charge, and had announced with determination that

she was at once going to begin a course in fairy tales. Katherine, whose fortnight of rental was over by many days, had taken the nurse's place and made, to Comfort at least, a very satisfactory substitute. Big Bear, too, it seemed, quite approved of her, and never growled at her in the way that he did at Mrs. Ogden whom he was for sending straight back to New York to David almost as soon as she arrived. Fairy-godmother was very glad indeed that Mrs. Ogden made a face at him and told him candidly that she should do as she thought best—for it meant that there were mornings of incessant chatter as the two seemed to make up for lost time, or long, delicious silences when the needles of both flew in and out, fashioning sheer articles of apparel to be needed very soon.

It was all, indeed, as Fairy-godmother said, "wonnerful."

There was only one flaw in the happiness: the Prince was not there. This seemed very queer, too, for he had promised, ever since he had heard that she was ill, that he would come as soon as she began to improve. Those were his very words—"began to improve"—and she inquired anxiously about the spelling so that there could be no mistake in her quotation of the phrase when she reminded him. At

first his excuses, though varied, seemed to be quite understandable; but of late he had even stopped making them. He simply did not refer to his visit at all. He ignored those sentences in her painful scrawls which suggested it. Despite her faith in him, she felt hurt, and two others knew that she felt hurt before she knew it herself—three others, in fact—for in reality the Prince would stare at the ignored sentences moodily, and then go out for a long tramp somewhere.

It was certainly very queer. Mr. Carruthers arrived, so it was clear that people could leave things and come from New York. Yet even he, much as he seemed to like being there, insisted on staying with Mr. Ames at the Club instead of accepting Comfort's hospitable offer of the south bedroom which had not a single-wingle person in it. (The desirability of having all of one's rooms full had been instilled into Comfort.) She liked Mr. Carruthers for he was very kind and pleasant to her and the Princess—whom he seemed to love so much that Fairy-godmother wished more than ever that the Prince would come. But Mrs. Ogden he glowered at worse than had the Big Bear (with whom he had conferences frequently) and, between them, they quite bullied her into returning with Mr. Carruthers to David

and the sea. Big Bear insisted on the sea; while Mr. Carruthers, with a sly wink at the physician, spoke most of David. The Princess, they assured her many times, was quite capable of looking after Fairy-godmother, and both would return to New York very soon.

It was on their last day together that Fairy-godmother said wistfully to Mrs. Ogden:

"Give our love to the Big Prince and tell him that we miss him very, very much and want him to come."

Mrs. Ogden looked at her sister in a very queer way—quite, indeed, as if she were pleading: "May I, Katsie?"

There was an expression in the face of the Princess that the child had never seen there before as she replied coldly:

"You may tell him that Fairy-godmother is looking forward to going to him soon."

Then Comfort, the tentacles of whose mind were groping eagerly as of yore, heard words and phrases which she memorized carefully during the following hours of nothing to do, turning them over and over in her brain in the vain attempt to squeeze the meaning out of them.

"You will never forgive him, Katsie?" Mrs. Ogden had asked, and the Princess had replied with

a queer little rush of words that tumbled over each other in their haste to leave her lips:

"Mollie, don't you see? Can't you understand that the fact of your not—being dead—does not make any difference in what he did? In what he would always be in my eyes? The man I knew has never really lived at all, and the man who does live has ruined even his memory. Please try to understand. Don't think me obstinately hard."

"But he has tried to make restitution in every way."

"Pah! Money that was yours by right and that he could not use if he tried a lifetime! The sole sacrifice to him was in not having it published on the front pages of the papers!"

"Katsie! You know that is unfair!"

"Unfair or not"—a hard little line crept about the lips of the Princess—"all the pain and the misery, the emptiness and bitterness of my life and yours are due to him. Why should I give him further opportunity to disturb me? It was vast sport he had with my credulity once—but, really, it is hardly necessary to make a Roman holiday a continuous celebration."

It was all very interesting and—with the exception of a few words that she did not know—very easy

to remember, so Comfort went through the duologue many times while Katherine fancied that she was whispering fairy tales.

A month afterward as she was wandering hand in hand with her Prince about the upper terrace at Martindale she asked abruptly:

"What is a roam and holiday?"

After a moment of pause, he had understood and smilingly countered with another question which wrought sad havoc in its answer with his peace of mind. Bit by bit she repeated it all, slurring in tender solicitude the words that she fancied might hurt him only to bring into greater prominence the phrases that stabbed most cruelly.

"I think," she said gently, "that the Princess doesn't unnerstand and she's afraid of toads and score pins. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps." His moody gaze brought no comfort to her.

"What ought we to do about her?"

"We can do nothing, Fairy-godmother," he said sadly, "until you can wave your wand over her mind and change from a beast back into a prince the picture of me that you find there."

"I'll try," promised Comfort soberly—and then

she sighed: it seemed that a fairy godmother's work was never done!

From that day on she watched her opportunity, and it came not long after, when she was staying the week-end with them all in town before Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers and David went to London where, it seemed, Mr. Carruthers was to spend several months, "looking over situations." At least, that was the way she understood it and it had caused her some anxiety.

"Has Mr. Carruthers lost his job?" she had inquired of Martin, rather startling him until he grasped her understanding of it.

"I am afraid not," he had replied, twinkling. "I am trying to make him lose it, however, for I have what I consider a much better one for him."

"That's good," she replied with a sigh. "It would be tough, wouldn't it, to lose your job as soon as you were married?"

"Indeed."

"I like Mr. Carruthers; he's so zippy! And the way he puts the pep into our bunch is something wonnerful." A remark which delineated the tonic effect of Carruthers's presence so accurately that "zippy" became a household word thereafter.

Comfort had stayed over with Katherine after their leaving for she had instinctively anticipated the girl's loneliness, made more acute by the jubilant happiness that was suddenly swept away as if she had no real part in it. They had had many things to discuss—the Princess and her Fairy-godmother—for plans were being made that had to do intimately with them both: the Prince was going to adopt Comfort! She had not been exactly sure at first just what that meant, nor why the Prince had insisted on Mr. Gnome's going down South to find out if she had any "relations."

"The Prince said he thought it would be better all 'round, in case anything should ever come up," she explained to Katherine who was listening to it all wistfully. "I was wonnerfully glad that they were all dead for I don't want any relations 'cept you and the Prince." She felt a little quiver go through the girl's body at the words and quite irrelevantly she said: "Preciousest Princess, may I please scringle your hair if I brush it all out nice before you go to bed?"

Smilingly the Princess loosened the bubbly masses and Comfort stood a moment, lost in admiration.

"I wish the Prince could see it down," she said absently, and then at a queer expression that flitted

across the eyes of the Princess, she caught up the shining billows and began arranging them in a *coiffure* that caught her fancy, using many odd little undulations of the hand. So engrossed was she in her task, her hands wreathing and fondling it, and her lips moving soundlessly, that she was startled at a low laugh. Looking up guiltily she met the eyes of the Princess in the mirror.

"What in the world are you doing, child?" the musical cadence demanded, laughter in the lilt of it.

"I was just—transformin'," she breathed penitently.

"Transforming what?" Here was a mystery!

"The beast that's in your mind back into the Big Prince. He's so missable!"

The Princess held her off at arm's length and gazed searchingly into the luminous depths of the clear eyes. Then she clasped her close.

"You blessed baby!" she exclaimed, with a new thrill in her voice. "May you never know what it is to have a beast in your mind that will not change, but grins and grins and grins at you until, sometimes, you almost go mad!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE Christmas party had been a grand success. Everybody said so. Of course, it would have been nicer if the Carruthers had been home, but the Proutys enjoyed it quite as much, perhaps, as if they had been. It was Mr. Prince's introduction to the Proutys (for Mr. Short was going to be a Prouty very soon) in the character of Mr. Charles E. Martin of New York and Martindale. Comfort felt that she had done wonderfully well to keep it from them that the "farm" which Mr. Prince had was the country place of which they had chatted so interestedly and familiarly of old. Yet she had an intuitive notion that they would feel more comfortable if they thought their host was to be the Mr. Prince whom they knew very well. It was in every sense her party. She had chosen the tree, the guests, the gifts for them, and had been duly consulted about the dinner. A happier small person could not have been found anywhere. Martin had almost forgotten the gnawing ache of incompleteness in his own scheme of things as he watched her de-

lightedly dispensing her gifts. But now it was all over and she seemed unwarrantably anxious for them to depart. It was assuredly not in the least like her hospitable little self, and he marvelled. He turned with a start at the voice of Gladys Prouty at his elbow:

"Well, Mr. Prince—I mean Martin—I've had the swellest time I ever had in my life and that's going some, if you know what I mean."

Mother Prouty chimed in with *empressment:* "It's God's truth, Mr. Martin! I don't know when anything ever happened to me so sort of genteel." Martin smiled cordially. He was quieter, they thought, and "sort of gentler" than he used to be. It was their fashion of expressing the transmutation of the ironic humour into a gracious acceptance of the foibles of others as in no degree estranging them from him. He had gained much of Cricket's tolerance, with none of his caustic wit.

"I am very glad," he said in reply. "I am only sorry that we cannot persuade you to stay here overnight, and glimpse the Christmas tree on Christmas morning as well as the Eve. This does not fit my notion of hospitality at all—having you catch a night train into New York."

"Oh, but——" began Comfort, anxiously, hopping from one foot to the other.

"I'm sure that Mrs. Hardy would have made you very comfortable. She delights in having company," he went on serenely, quite oblivious of sundry twitchings of his sleeve. Mrs. Prouty paused and glanced at her daughter and Comfort intercepted the glance with obvious distress.

"Oh, I think they'd better go," she offered. "It's very pleasant, riding on the train at night!"

Cricket laughed in genuine merriment and the Proutys exchanged glances of amusement and moved toward the arch of the hospitable library where the tree spread its lavish branches. Martin was genuinely astonished at the child's behaviour.

"Why, dear little Fairy-godmother," he protested, laughing despite himself, "you know that this is your Christmas party and——"

Comfort caught his hand pleadingly. "Yes, and it was an awfully lovely party, Mr. Prince, and everybody had a good time; but now it's over, you see, and everybody ought to go but us." Her very large and expansive wink included the whole roomful at this announcement.

The pained expression on Martin's face was not simulated to her but real, and she drew his arm about her as she explained:

"You see, Stepsister has got her watch, and Mr.

Gnome has got his 'pointment, and Mr. Giant has got his jewl'ry, and Stepmother has got her velvut cloak, and I've got—oh! millions and millions of things! An' a 'doption, which is most of all! But you haven't your pressunt yet, and you can't have it till they go!"

Martin smiled whimsically upon them. "I hope that every one understands that this is no lack of affection or hospitality upon our part—only some mysterious gift which cannot, for some reason, be presented until the party is over."

"Oh, it's all right with us, Mr. Pr-Martin," assured Miss Prouty. "She's just ben bustin' with what she's going to give you and I don't think she could hold in much longer. I hope you tell us after it's over. It must be some Christmas present, all right!" with an elaborate wink at the others. "No, really, it's the honest-to-goodness truth, I wouldn't miss Christmas morning in the city for anything."

Bland appeared upon the threshold with a suavity increased by the memory of his late ignominious equality among them.

"Hi 'ave hordered the car, sir, hand it will be 'ere, sir, in five minutes not to 'urry, sir, for there's plenty of time to make the train." He was about to withdraw when Comfort called him:

"Oh, Mr. Bland!" She whispered excitedly in his ear as he bent over her in vain attempt to hide the smile on his lips.

"Yes, Miss Fairy-godmother, it's hall right. I told Jenkins about that, Miss, and Mrs. 'Ardy said would you 'ave the goodness to speak to 'er a minute about a himportant harrangement."

Comfort lifted her chin in such exact imitation of the Princess that Martin gasped. The words, however, she borrowed from his own vocabulary as she replied:

"Certainly, Mr. Bland. Tell Mrs. Hardy I shall communicate with her as soon as I have taken leave of my guests!" Bland coughed as he hurriedly departed, Gladys stifled a giggle, and Cricket went over to the window and stared very fixedly out into the moonlit snow.

"Listen to it!" murmured Miss Prouty, wandering over to him; "ain't it there with the highbrow? It will be polly-vooin' in a year if you know what I mean."

"Hoo-hoo, Mr. Bland!" called Fairy-godmother, racing after him, her pose quite forgotten, "tell her that anything's all right with me! There's no rush!" A general smile greeted her return.

"Well, we gotta be goin'. Get your duds on, ma!

You aint going to wear that velvut cloak back to the city on the train, are you? Gee, but you've certainly been good to the Prouty family, Mr. Martin! That's the swellest bracelet watch I ever saw! I cert'ny never expected to really own one with a gennywine stone in it."

"Fairy-godmother deserves all the credit of the selection," Martin laughed. "She seemed to think that she knew what every one wanted most."

"Well, she cert'ny hit me right where I lived," asseverated Miss Prouty giving, as usual, a necessary exordium to her mother's lassitudinous speech.

"I've always just longed for a velvut cloak, Mr. Martin," averred that lady. "They're so sort of aristocratic looking! And I never dared to hope for fur on it." She stroked the undreamed-of luxury with tender fingers. "That's real, too; I can always tell—the way they're dyed."

A year ago Martin would have hidden a smile, but now the words brought a far different feeling and he was glad to turn to Short and receive that person's ponderous thanks and assurances of a delightful evening.

Comfort, who had been receiving a querying undertone from Miss Prouty, suddenly rushed upon him:

"Oh, Mr. Prince, Stepsister says would you mind

if she took Mr. Giant to get a squint at the ball room, for he isn't likely to get a chance to set his lamps on such a swell joint again in some time."

"Let Miss Gladys show Mr. Short anything that she 'wishes," he smiled over the child's head at the girl who was, with a great assumption of unconsciousness, fingering her bracelet watch. "You will have several minutes before time to start. Peters will sound the motor horn for you."

"Oh, thanks ever so much, Mr. Martin! They's several little ideas that I'd like him to get here. Of course we can't afford anything like this, but we both like things that are sort of classy, and we might get imitations. I suppose you noticed my ring?" she queried, flashing it by a deft turn of the hand. "It's my Christmus present from him."

"Indeed I noticed it at once, Miss Gladys. I hope that you will be as happy as you deserve to be, and that is saying a great deal." Miss Gladys Prouty twisted her neck upon its high collar to make sure that her fiancé was out of earshot, and that Cricket and Fairy-godmother were quite absorbed in making an engine go (Comfort had a passion for mechanical toys). Then she said confidentially in a low tone:

"Oh, I think I'll be happy all right. Of course,

marriage is a gamble, but my motto is, 'take your pick and then shut up about it.' I don't believe in startin' anything I think I can't finish, and Short has got class and he suits me." She turned the ring on her finger speculatively. "Flashes nice, don't it?" she mused. "It's gennywine, too."

"It is a very pretty ring," Martin assured her.

"Oh, you could do better maybe if you had a billion dollars," carelessly, "but I like it. Short ast me if I'd rather have a big one with a flaw in it or a little one that hadn't none, becuz they was the same price; and I says to him: 'Lord, Short, if you are a-going to purchase something that's a dollar down and a dollar a week the rest of your life, for Pete's sake, get something that looks the part. If you gotta use a microscope on a ring, I believe in usin' it lookin' for the flaw and not for the stone.' That's me, all over!"

"I believe it is," agreed Martin heartily yet inscrutably, "and I think that you did exactly right. I want to know as soon as you have decided upon the date definitely, for Fairy-godmother and I shall want a share in the plans."

"Oh bee-lieve me, Mr. Martin," laughed Miss Gladys, backing toward the door in the way that she had read, in the etiquette column of the daily

paper, it should be done. "I'm right on the spot with the info any time she asks me. If there's anything floating toward me that looks like a wedding present, I ain't the one to look shy, and back off and murmuh: 'Why, rully—I never expected anything of the kind!'"

As Miss Gladys finally attained the vanishing point of the draperies in her backward manœuvres, Martin glanced helplessly at Cricket and both seemed to be seized at identically the same moment with such a violent tickling in the throat that Comfort looked up from her engine in surprise:

"Well—whaddye know about that?" she demanded in wide-eyed astonishment. It was a remark that turned Martin suddenly grave—with a helpless glance at Cricket at which the latter's throat became more unmanageable than ever. As soon as he could gain control of his vocal cords he commented with a lift of the eyebrows:

"Martin, you're the best chap alive, but you are going to have your hands full in training us along the path we should go."

A shadow of pain flitted across the finely chiselled, thoughtful face:

"Don't, Cricket," he begged. "I feel like an unconscionable prig. Lord help me; I'm not trying to train any one! I have pitiful need of discipline

myself." It was a trend which Cricket swiftly interrupted by whimsy.

"How do you know that I shall make any sort of a vice-president and general counsel-in-chief in this company you are forming to take over Carruthers's happily about-to-be-defunct magazine—and the rest of it?"

"I don't, Cricket," replied Martin, glinting a smile. "You may make a tremendous mess of it! But that is only what the present publishers have done and we shall, I hope, be reckoned as a faithful failure at least—while they——"

"You have the optimism that looks upon a failure or so as more or less a means of progress?" Martin's vital creed was tossed at him with no thought of its meaning to him, as Cricket cheerfully pulled Fairy-godmother's curls.

"That belief alone keeps me morally alive from day to day," he answered, turning away to the window, and Fairy-godmother, understanding, not the words but the deeper need of the spirit with her wonderful intuition of things not of earth-earthy, slipped away from Cricket and began caressing Martin's hand. Cricket wisely chose to disregard the minor, and plunged at once into the common chord:

"Your faith in me certainly will make me ambi-

tious and loyal—but there is such a thing, my dear fellow, as efficiency *per se*."

"Lord, yes!" Martin raised an eyebrow in a compelling reaction of mood; "and if you discover any one in the personnel who is efficient *per se*, dismiss him! I will not have such a being on the pay roll. I have handed over this thing to you and Carruthers: to Carruthers, because he knows all there is to know about the making of a magazine; to you, because your ignorance on the subject is quite as vast as his knowledge. You will make a capital team, and I wash my hands of you, save upon one point: my presidency consists in decreeing that the financial returns thereof shall not be overweening. If I discover that you two are making too much money out of this thing, it will demonstrate to me beyond the shadow of a doubt that somebody on the staff is growing efficient—and you will have to take it off my hands. Make money if you want to; but remember, it is at your own peril if you do."

Cricket was chuckling a submissive: "Ay-ay, captain!"

"Moreover," Martin continued impressively, "you might as well understand right now that I wish it known that you prefer new writers, and that you accept material from well-known authors only when

the unstoried and unsung cannot fill your pages with the stuff that people want to read."

"Oh, it's to be a popular venture, is it?" queried Cricket enjoyingly.

"Oh, my, yes! (If Fairy-godmother will loan me the use of her phrase!) It is to be very popular, for it is to have truth to life or truth to fancy—as the theme demands—simply and clearly written."

"Fairy stories?" inquired Comfort absorbedly.

"By all means fairy stories! We're going to start on a quest to find all the hidden treasures of the world -love being chief——"

("Somewhat of a large order," murmured Cricket.)

" . . . And we're leaving the possibly necessary exhumations to others; but of course the details of this arrangement are to be left to our more practical chief, Carruthers."

"I begin to draw a freer breath upon this," twinkled Cricket relievedly. Martin laughed and shrugged away his whimsy.

"All the same, Cricket," he said, in a practical tone, "I believe that people will continue to read, for the most and best part, sane, wholesome stuff, clean in purpose and style, and I am willing to back this theory financially. By the way—don't forget that I am expecting you to continue those

articles of yours; you are too good to waste as a mere vice-president and counsel, for both of us will sit at Carruthers's feet when it comes to anything important in law or doctrine."

"You will look funny," observed Comfort with a little giggle as her swift visualization flashed the picture to her. "Oh," as Cricket, smiling, moved toward the door at the sound of the clarion call to the car, "you aren't going, Mr. Gnome?" and Martin echoed:

"Surely you don't have to race away in this fashion, old man?" Cricket nodded with an odd, wistful smile as Comfort disappeared to make sure that her other guests were not to be left.

"Thanks, Martin, but I'm like Miss Gladys—I must have my Christmas morning in the city!"

"Cricket!" The low call from Martin was in a tone that was new to Cricket, and he turned hastily. There was misery written on the face of his friend—a misery of soul and body hunger that suddenly turned him gaunt and haggard.

"Cricket, I can't stand this! Tell me only one thing—for there is a conspiracy of silence about her; is she—happy?"

"Yes," said Cricket simply. Then he added: "happier than she has been since——"

"I know. Forgive me; but I have been half mad, I think. The child used to tell me—bits, now and then—crumbs on which I lived—but they have sealed her lips, too—now. I thought I could bear it better if I knew just that she was not—unhappy."

"She is not unhappy." Cricket's tone was even, and he spoke with a forced simplicity that seemed, somehow, chill and distant.

"Don't think me an utter fool. I know nothing of her life since I saw her last. It is torture not to feel sure even of her consistent hatred."

"She no longer hates you. She is busy and happy." The facts were put in *staccato* fashion.

"You see her frequently?"

"When she is in town."

"Happiness would not come to a woman of her type unless—is there some one——?"

"There is."

"God!" It was only a breath, but the agony of it was complete. For a moment Cricket faltered, but the laugh of Fairy-godmother in the hall relieved the tension.

"Excuse me, Mr. Gnome"—she appeared at the doorway, flushed and happy—"but they've gone out to the car!"

Martin and Cricket silently gripped hands.

CHAPTER XXX

LEFT alone, Martin dropped moodily into the big armchair by the glowing cavern of the fireplace and was oblivious to the passing of minutes until soft hands were pressed over his eyes.

"Fairy-godmother!"

"You guessed me!" She settled herself comfortably on the arm of his chair. "You will please 'scuse me for being gone so long, but I had to see Mrs. Hardy 'bout some very, very important things."

"The burden of a household and a newly acquired Prince is heavy?"

"Oh, my, no! It's all right with me! I'm having a fine time!" the assurance came swiftly. "And the best—the vee-ree best—is coming soon!"

"How soon?"

"Just as soon as Mrs. Hardy can finish doing it up" (a little giggle of excitement). "It's the pressunt, you know. And it's the best of anything!"

"Better than the party?"

"Oh, millions and millions better! But it was an awfully lovely party, Mr. Prince"—contritely.

"Better than being adopted?" There was a dubious pause.

"Well," she began carefully, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, dear Big Prince, but it's nicer even than being 'dopted; just a teenty-weenty speck-mite nicer," she added, as she caught a little sigh that she interpreted into her own language. "It's this way: first comes the pressunt—oh, I 'most said it; then just the speckiest mite this way to it comes the being 'dopted; then comes the party; then just nordinary Christmus things."

"I understand. It must indeed be exciting—this present you are giving me!" Teasingly he added: "Are you quite sure that I shall like it?" How he tried—unlike the old Martin—to hide his mood from the colourful atmosphere it might cloud!

"Oh, you'll be crazy about it!"

"Ever hear me say that I wanted one?"

Such an excited little giggle! The child would be nervously worn out before her Christmas pleasuring was done!

"We-ell, not de-fin-nit-ly; but I know that you do!"

"Are you sure that it is entirely proper for me to have it?"

A shade of real anxiety came over her face. "That's what Mrs. Hardy said; but then she said as long as I 'sisted on giving it to you for Christmus, it would be all right, and so did——" She suddenly put a palm over her mouth. "Oh, mercy me! I was almost a leaves-dropper!"

"I am palpitating with eagerness to find out what it is that you"—here a shade of reproach crept into his voice—"would like the speck-mitiest bit better than belonging to me!"

Comfort put her arms about his neck.

"Oh, dear Mr. Prince, it isn't, trooly-rooly—'cepting that it's part of being 'dopted. And I love being 'dopted, I do, trooly-rooly, and I was scared stiff when Mr. Gnome was hunting up relations on me—weren't you?"

"I felt better when it was over, I will admit."

"Stepsister says that I'm a lucky guy to be able to choose my relations 'stead of having them wished on me like most people."

Martin brought her to his knee and spoke seriously:

"And one of the first things that we shall do is to find some very, very kind and cultured woman, who knows all about teaching little girls, to help the very finest little-girl thoughts in that dear little head

to grow up into the most beautiful young-lady thoughts clothed in the most carefully chosen words. What do you say to that?"

"Oh, but Mr. Prince, maybe you won't have to when——"

"Santa Claus!" Bland's voice made the announcement in a queer, choked utterance not in the least like Bland and he withdrew so precipitately that he almost tripped over the draperies—which, also, was not in the least like Bland.

Martin looked at the door in surprise. It was true. There stood Santa Claus—and with a bound, Comfort had left him and was drawing the bulky, masked, and bearded personage within the circle of the softly glowing candles on the tree—the sole light save the flickering red of the hearth. Santa Claus moved slowly—weighted down apparently with a vast deal of extraneous material.

"It's the pressunt! It's the pressunt!" shrieked Fairy-godmother, in wild excitement.

Truth to tell, Martin's attention was given rather to her than to the red-coated and white-wigged figure, for he feared her becoming overwrought, and he felt that Mrs. Hardy should not have let her embark upon such an exciting mystery. He slipped an arm about the little quivering form, and drew her

to him as, in a whimsical tone, he addressed himself to the fantastic visitor:

"We are very glad to welcome you, Santa Claus. You have given us quite a surprise—but we hope not more than our newly recovered health can endure, comfortably. You see, we were expecting you through the chimney, as usual." Comfort gurgled a delicious accompaniment. "Did you bring with you your pack, in which I hear there is a gift for me, or did you leave it with the reindeer on the roof?" Comfort fairly doubled over with appreciation of this, and Martin hearing a faint sound from behind the mask inquired in mock alarm: "You don't suppose that Santa is deaf and dumb, do you?"

"Oh, my, no!" she exclaimed. "But you see—It —can't talk until you find the pressunt; and you've got to find it yourself."

"Santa Claus, I sincerely hope that you, in the person of my beloved housekeeper, Mrs. Hardy, will pardon this liberty of search. It seems to be demanded of me." Helplessly he stood there; half laughing at his own uncertainty of what next to do as he looked from the tassel of the red cap that jauntily fitted on the white hair, to the furred hem of the cloak that, loose-belted, hung quite to the

floor. Fairy-godmother caught the expression of masculine helplessness, and a womanly pity stole over her. She pulled the masked and wigged head down to her and whispered in the ear so well concealed. Then with fingers that interlaced in a passion of excitement, she fixed her gaze upon the hem of the furred cloak. Martin's eyes obediently followed hers.

Suddenly, in the glow of the candle light, a miracle happened! Slowly it crept out—the flashing, scintillating miracle—crept out until it lay there like a live thing, joyously holding the fire of a great love in its heart! The quivering of squared shoulders under the swiftly indrawn breath, which seemed to thrill through his lithe frame and tremble out through the fingertips of the strong, sensitive hands, was all that two others saw: but one felt; and one—knew. Wordless, he dropped on one knee and with unsure fingers searched his pocket for the trinket that never left him, as the child was well aware. There seemed to be the magic of understanding in the air, for, as suddenly, the miracle was withdrawn and a point of satin blackness stole forth, lonely and unlit by any glistening! But not for long. Under Martin's fumbling fingers—more slowly moving than they had ever been before—grew

a miracle like to the other in every respect. The child uttered a sob of delight—the crystal slipper had found its mate!

When he looked up, pleading and scarce believing that it was indeed a fairy tale come true, he found brown eyes under bubbly hair looking straight into his. Ruddy mask and white locks had disappeared! He swung to his feet and caught her outstretched hands:

"Katherine!"

Fairy-godmother danced about them in an abandon of joyousness that would have done credit to a Bacchante.

"Now, isn't it better than the party, and the 'doption, and everything? Because we never, never would have been happy without her in the whole world! And I told her; and she came for a Christmus pressunt."

The chill of fear swept over him and he searched her eyes.

"Katherine," he demanded tensely, "what does it all mean? Have you come—just for the reason that the child gave? That we could never be happy without you? God knows it is only too true—but don't let that roseleaf keep you from happiness without us."

"There is no happiness," she whispered softly, "without you."

Red cloak, tumbled hair and all, the Prince took the Princess in his arms in the glow of the Christmas candles.

Perhaps because there was a real weariness in the little body that had wrought so faithfully with fairy power to bring happiness to all; perhaps because she caught the spirit of peace from the thrilling quiet of the two she loved, Fairy-godmother's mood grew wonderingly gentle—for she was mystified herself at the marvels of the night—and she chanted, none the less joyously in that it was reverently subdued:

"Now I *know* that I am a trooly-rooly Fairy—a Fairy—a Fairy!"

THE END

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